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MEDITATIONS

ON

THE SONG OF SOLOMON.

BY ANDREW MILLER.

"My meditation of him shall be sweet."—Psalm civ. 34.

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PREFACE.

At the request of many of the readers of "Things New and Old," the "Meditations" now appear in a separate volume. And here I may state what I *thought* and *felt* in commencing these studies on the Canticles.

Amidst the incessant calls to public labour in London, it requires great diligence and watchfulness, to maintain the soul in fulness and freshness suited to the Lord's service; and unless the soul finds ways and means of drinking for *itself* at the fountain head, it will soon become unprofitable in ministry. Every fresh service ought to be the result of fresh, personal communion with the living Head, the fountain of all supply. Nothing short of this will meet the need. There must be enjoyed association with the Source of life and blessing, in order to become the channel of life and blessing to others. *Ability*, however great, *gift*, however distinct, are not enough without personal communion.

If anything be allowed to come in between the heart of the servant and his Master, his service will be marred. "For me to live is Christ." "I can do all things through Christ, which strengtheneth me," was the high ground of the apostle. Christ was his motive, power, and object.

He did all in the view of Christ. This is the true ground of service, however far below the apostle's measure the servant may be. When this is the condition of his soul, Christ is honoured, the Spirit is ungrieved and acts in power, and the soul must be full and fresh for service. There may be little time for private study, yet we learn. The Spirit is our teacher, and in this state of mind we are easily taught. "If any man thirst," says Christ, "let him come unto *me* and *drink*. He that believeth on me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water." It is perfectly clear from what the Lord here says, that we must first drink the living waters for our own refreshment, before they can flow out for the refreshment of others.

Conscious of this need, and where the full supply could only be found, the "Song of Songs" presented a most inviting theme for this purpose. The whole book is full of Christ; and more especially is it filled with the free expression of His thoughts, feelings, affections, and desires towards His spouse, and all who put their trust in Him. Hence the study of the book brings the soul into direct communion with the person of the Lord in a very precious way. And, surely, nothing is so fitted to meet every need of the servant, both for public and private service. With these thoughts, and with this end in view, the "Meditations" were commenced. And if my readers have entered with me into the spirit of these studies, they may be able to speak with me of profit therefrom. To be admitted, as it were, to the inner temple of the Saviour's heart, is surely the greatest privilege and blessing we can now enjoy.

I have thus freely expressed my thoughts and feelings, in the hope that some may be helped and encouraged thereby. Many known to me, who have a willing heart for service, feel pressed for time. Engaged in business during the day, and with meetings almost every evening, *when* or *where* is the time, they may truly say, for drinking in? I am familiar with the difficulty. But it is a much happier thing to be overpressed with service for the Lord, than hardly to know how to fill up your time. Be thankful! The very pressure, when the Master is before the mind, separates the heart from the scene around. Nothing else will; and the moment the hands are freed from the secular they are ready for the spiritual.

But, after all, the one grand personal question is—*Has Christ His right place in my heart*, and *His truth its right place in my ways?* If so, all other things will naturally fall into their places, and divine light will shine on all my path.

The Lord grant that this may ever be the case with both reader and writer, for His own name sake.

A. M.

London.

"Song o'er all songs transcendent! Mighty theme!
Amid the lovely, lovelier still,
Amid the lofty, more majestic still,
More richly, more seraphically fraught
With music from the everlasting hills—
In awe, in reverence, and yet with joy,
Turn we to listen to thy sacred tones;
And from the world and the world's din removed,
In sweet retirement with the Book of God,
To cherish contemplation on each line,
Replete with meanings high and wonderful,
Indited by the Lord, the Comforter!"

Metrical Meditations.

MEDITATIONS

ON

THE SONG OF SOLOMON.

CHAPTER I.

There is nothing which the men of this world dread more than *solitude* and *reflection*. They would rather be overpressed with engagements than have leisure for thought. The conscience, ill at ease, will at such times lift up its voice; but its warning voice must be hushed by that convenient word *duty*, and its honest speech is soon and willingly forgotten. Sins—many sins—are there, and the thought of God as the judge of sin is dreadful. The condition of the soul is such that it cannot bear the light, therefore darkness is loved. The activities of this present life are sought and welcomed, that the crushing weight of reflection may be escaped. The pleasures of the world, too, in due time and place, serve a similar purpose.

Thus every care is taken that solitude may be avoided, and that there may be no opportunity for calm and serious reflection. The solemn and eternal realities of the soul have no portion of thought or time allowed them; the higher, nobler, and better part of man is totally neglected, and left uncared for, and unprovided

for, notwithstanding its deep, pressing, and eternal need. "For what shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" Mark viii. 36, 37.

Such, alas! is man—man without the knowledge of God—without the knowledge of his condition as a sinner, and without the knowledge of Jesus as the Saviour of sinners.

But turn for a while, O, my soul, from the contemplation of a scene so heart-rending, though strong, yet tender, are the links that would draw thee there, and lead thee to wean loved ones from it, and win them for Christ. Cherish a spirit of *meditation* in the sweet solitudes of the soul's separation from the world, where the scene is radiant with the presence of the Saviour, and joyous with "The Song of Songs." The wider the separation from the world, the deeper the communion, the richer the blessing. In heart and spirit having no sympathy with it; and, really, though in it, yet far away from its bustle and all its unhallowed scenes. A mighty chasm now separates believers from this present evil world: "They are not of the world," says Christ, "even as I am not of the world." The position of Christ in resurrection is the definition of ours as seen in Him. The calm, reflective quiet of the soul in communion with the Person of the exalted Lord, is what characterizes its sweetest moments while here on earth. These may be found in the chamber of sickness, the rural scene, or in the very seat and centre of this world's activities. All depends on the state of the heart. To be alone, and yet not alone, how blessed!

Ver. 1. "*The song of songs, which is Solomon's.*" But why call this precious little book "The Song of Songs?" Just because it is Solomon's, or, rather, Christ's, who will in due time be king in Jerusalem, in true Solomon glory. On the same principle He is called "King of kings, and Lord of lords." Pre-eminence in all things is His. There are many sweet songs in Scripture. Moses, Miriam and her maidens, Deborah, and David, all sang sweetly of the Lord's goodness. It is said of Solomon himself that "his songs were a thousand and five;" but this one he styles "The Song of Songs." It far surpassed them all. It is the deep melody of hearts filled with holy love, and finding their supreme delight in its full and free expression. "We love him because he first loved us." Oh! to be able at all times to sing the song of the Saviour's love, with the heart and with the understanding also.

> May each, may all, that master-key of truth—
> *Its reference to Christ*—through grace attain,
> And, holding firm the torch of Scripture-light,
> Comparing book with book, and text with text,
> Enter the precincts, otherwise obscure,
> Of *meditation* on "The Song of Songs."

Ver. 2. "*Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth.*" What unsuspecting, pure, and impassioned affection breathes in this remarkable address. It is like the artless, yet ardent, kindling of affection between the nearest kindred when they meet after a long absence. So engrossed is the heart with its object, that forms, ceremonies, and all surrounding circumstances are entirely lost sight of. The happy consciousness of the place which she has in His heart carries her away.

How few there are in this world that one could so unformally and affectionately address: and yet this is the language of a saved sinner to the holy Saviour. Dost thou, O my soul, understand this? No doubts, no fears in the heart that can thus address the divine Bridegroom—the glorified Jesus in heaven. Many now-a-days think it presumption to have full, perfect, unmisgiving confidence in His grace and love, and if they dare venture to trust Him, it is with many doubts and fears; and that, too, after He has written His love to lost sinners in characters of blood, and engraven it as on the face of the rock for ever. What must such think of the boldness of the Bride? That she has forgotten herself, her place? Ah! no. The secret is this: the conscience, having been cleared of all sin by the one sacrifice of the once lowly Jesus, the heart is now free and happy in the presence of the risen and glorified Christ. And this is all that any guilty sinner needs to make him feel at home and happy in the chamber of the King, namely, the blood of Christ for the conscience, and the Person of Christ for the heart. Every blessing will be found folded up in these two. Every Christian has both. Lord, help them to believe it!

In this blessed little book, mark well, my soul, there is no mention of sin, pardon, or justification. Why is this? These questions had been previously settled, and now the heart is enjoying full and perfect liberty in the Lord's presence. All such questions, in every case, are settled when the sinner is first brought to the feet of Jesus—settled on the solid ground of the Saviour's finished work—never, no never again to be raised, so far as God and faith are concerned. Satan, and the

unbelief of our own hearts, may seek to disturb the eternally settled question; but all such thoughts should be treated as coming from such sources. "I know that whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever: nothing can be put to it, nor anything taken from it." (Eccl. iii. 14.) Hence, the heart that knows these things is free, happy, and at home in the immediate presence of the Lord, and that, too, in the highest sense. "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth."

Here, the heart is breathing after, not the sense of forgiveness, but a more direct demonstration of His love. She is occupied with Himself. Not so much with any of His qualities, or with any particular kindness she has received from Him, as with Himself personally. Having Him she has all His qualities and all His kindnesses; as she says, "Let HIM kiss me." She has no idea of explaining of whom she thus speaks. There is a condensed as well as an expansive energy in love. It reminds us of the loving and bereaved heart of Mary when she said, "Sir, if thou have borne HIM hence, tell me where thou hast laid HIM." He was first and last in her mind, no one else was in her heart from whom to distinguish Him, and there was none with whom she could compare Him. She knew of no one else to be thought of, or cared for. Nothing could satisfy her heart but the Person of her Lord, dead or alive. Wondrous affection! Oh, that He had such a place in this poor heart of mine! "A little while," and He shall have it all, and for ever. Oh! hasten the happy day, my Lord, thou well-beloved of the Church, thy Bride.

In holy scripture we find a *kiss* is the token of re-

conciliation, the pledge of peace, and the expression of affection. It is said of David and Jonathan, that they kissed one another, and wept one with the other, until *David exceeded.*" (1 Sam. xx. 41.) Sweet illustration of the true David, ever exceeding all our love. "Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound." And Joseph, too, "kissed all his brethren and wept upon them, and after that his brethren talked with him." (Gen. xlv. 15.) And, again, the father kissed the prodigal while he was yet in his rags. And would such demonstrations of love be too much to ask, or expect, after he was cleansed from all his defilement, and clothed in the best robe? Assuredly not! Is it too much then for the Bride in the Canticles—for the believer in Jesus—to desire such an expression of the Lord's love? Certain we are that she desired it, not because she had any doubt of its being there, but because she delighted in its manifestation. Love can only be satisfied with love.

"*For thy love is better than wine.*" The love of Jesus is now preferred to all the joys of earth. Wine is the symbol of the natural delights of men—the joys and the luxuries of earth. But what are all these now, in their most charming form, to the soul that is delighting in the love of Jesus? They have lost their charm for the eye and the heart, and now they would be a weariness and a burden heavy to be borne. Jesus Himself is the soul's delight. "Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see Him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory." 1 Peter i. 8.

The vine-tree has its roots in the earth. The Naza-

rite, while under his vow, was to taste nothing that was made of the vine-tree, from the kernels even to the husks. (See Numb. vi.) He was to be entirely separate from the pleasures of the world unto the Lord. Every believer is a Nazarite, according to the blessed Lord's own vow. "But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom." (Matt. xxvi. 29.) Being associated with Him, we are under His vow; and ought to be true Nazarites unto God. But this can only be by finding all our joy, delight, and satisfaction in *the love of Jesus*. He is now patiently waiting, far away from the joys of earth, until the bright millennial morning, when He shall again come forth, in His true Melchizedec character, to refresh the victorious armies of Israel, the children of Abraham, with the bread and wine of the kingdom. (Gen. xiv.) We, too, should patiently wait till then, for we shall come forth with Him in heavenly glory. The full period of the vow shall then be accomplished. The King in Jerusalem shall again be united to His earthly people, and all nations shall be made glad and rejoice in their joy and gladness. And then shall the daughter of Zion know the meaning of those words long ago uttered at the marriage in Cana of Galilee, "But thou hast kept the good wine until *now*."

"Thy love we own, Lord Jesus;
And wait to see thy glory,
To know as known, and fully own
Thy perfect grace before Thee:
We plead thy parting promise,
Come, Saviour, to release us.
Then endless praise our lips shall raise,
For love like Thine, Lord Jesus."

Ver. 3. "*Because of the savour of thy good ointments thy name is as ointment poured forth, therefore do the virgins love thee.*" Now she gives us some idea of His name, "thy name is as ointment poured forth." To her heart it is most fragrant. All His names, titles, attributes, and relationships are most sweet to her taste. His name is Himself. It is expressive of His nature, excellencies, and graces. She is at a loss to utter the riches of his goodness, therefore she says, "His name is as ointment *poured forth.*" The *savour* of His ointment is not confined to herself; those associated with her share in its profusion. The attendant virgins are attracted and refreshed by the sweet odours of His name. Happy thought! It is not an ointment sealed up, but "poured forth." Oh! what fellowship there is in the love of Jesus! Here pause a little, O my soul, and meditate on the fulness of the name of Jesus: "For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily." What a centre, what a source it is! Around it the Church of God is now gathered as its only centre, by the quickening power and indwelling of the Holy Ghost. "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the *midst* of them." But ere long, the heavens and the earth shall be united by its power and glory. The earthly Jerusalem and the cities of Judah, with all the surrounding nations; the heavenly Jerusalem, and the innumerable company of angels, a general assembly; and the Church of the first-born ones which are written in heaven, shall all be attracted to and united by that one dear *uniting name.* The Father hath purposed this wondrous glory for His Son, and it shall surely come to pass, "That in the dispensation of

the fulness of times (the millennium) he might gather together in one (under one head) all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth, even in him." (Eph. i. 11.) Then shall the fragrance of His name be wafted on every breeze, and all kindreds and tongues shall unite in that note of praise, "O LORD, our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth." Psalm viii.

And when the thousand years of millennial blessing and glory shall have run their course, the heavens and the earth fled away, and the final judgment past, that name shall have lost none of its fragrance, power, and glory. It will then unite in sweetest love, in holiest bonds, the many circles, the countless myriads of the new heavens and the new earth. The joy of every heart, the melody of every tongue, shall find their spring, power, motive, and object in Him. Every mountain of myrrh, and every hill of frankincense, shall owe their sweetness to His presence. And still His name shall be as ointment poured forth; yes, "poured forth," and "poured forth" for ever. All His garments smelling of myrrh, aloes, and cassia, in the ivory palaces. And as age after age rolls on, the rich and varied graces of His love shall still be "poured forth" in infinite profusion, causing all hands and hearts and lips to drop with sweet smelling myrrh, and filling every scene throughout the vast realms of the blest with the eternal fragrance of His name.

> Jesus! the lost one's refuge! Sound it forth,
> Ye heralds of salvation, through the earth.
> Glory to God! good will to sinful men,
> And peace to a convulsed and wretched world,
> These are its mingled perfumes! holy oil

Men cannot buy, and may not counterfeit,
But, flowing o'er our mystic Aaron's head,
Twill reach His lowest skirts; and bless His saints,
A savour unto life. Therefore they love,
Therefore in love increase eternally.

Ver. 4. "*Draw me, we will run after Thee.*" The more we know of Christ, the more shall we desire to know of Him. The nearer we are to Him, the more shall we desire to be drawn nearer still. As Paul says, "That I may know Him," yet none on earth knew him so well. And, again, "That I may win Christ," yet never was saint more sure of His prize than Paul. He could say in truth, though a prisoner in Rome, and in want, "For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." What rich experience—what quiet confidence—what boundless joy, shines in his letter to the Philippians!

There is such an infinity of blessing for us in Christ, that the more we apprehend it, the less we feel we have apprehended it. The more we taste of the reality and fulness of His love, we shall be able the more truly to say, *It passeth knowledge.* There are breadths and lengths, and depths and heights, which we can never comprehend. And there is such joy in His presence, that even while we are enjoying it, the heart so yearns for greater nearness, that it feels, comparatively, as at a distance.

Were I to read the heart of the loving Bride through these words, "Draw me, we will run after thee," I should say, her desire to be near the Person of the Lord is so great that, near, and dear, though she be, there is something like felt distance experienced. Hence the deep breathings of her heart, "Draw me"—oh! draw

me nearer—closer—my Lord to Thee! There is growth in grace,—compared with ver. 2—a growing apprehension of Himself. There is a greater desire for closer communion. It is similar to what we find in many of the Psalms. "O GOD, Thou art my God, early will I seek thee; my soul thirsteth for Thee, my flesh longeth for Thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is . . . . my soul followeth hard after Thee; Thy right hand upholdeth me." (Psalm lxiii.) The most blessed communion with the Lord, is perfectly consistent with the most earnest longings for greater nearness to Himself. Speakest thou thus, my soul, of thyself? Knowest thou this in thine own experience? Examine all thy words and ways as before the Lord, and pass judgment upon them. The Holy Spirit tells us that He tried His words, as in a furnace, "seven times." How often, alas, we both speak and write, without even trying them *once*.

There is a beautiful connection between the Lord's drawing, and our running. "We will run," but carefully note the last two words—"*after Thee*." There is more, much more, in these words than can here be noted. They are all-important. "After Thee," not after our own notions, or even after the best of men on earth, but "after Thee." As it is said in that beautiful sixteenth Psalm, "I have set the Lord *always* before me." Not at times, merely, but "always." Oh! what a path ours on earth would be were this the case! How separated would it be from everything that is not Christ. And, surely, in all fairness, when we pray, "draw me," we should be ready to add, like the spouse and her companions, "we will run after Thee."

But mark another deeply precious thought, suggested by the subject of our meditation. The One who draws, goes before. Thus the Lord goes before His people in the wilderness, and sees the danger and meets it, before they come to it. Many, many are the dangers we are, by Him, delivered from, that we know nothing about. "And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him." A snare may be laid for us by the enemy, in the way that we said we would go, but our divine Leader, seeing the snare, turns into another path, leads in another direction, and the snare which might have proved fatal is escaped. And yet, I may feel so disappointed, and so discontented, because something hindered me reaching my previously appointed place. Blessed Lord! may we ever, and only, "run after thee."

> "Draw me! I will run after Thee, will seek
> To hear obediently what Thou wilt speak:
> And step by step the blessed path would trace
> Of my beloved—full of truth and grace."

"*The King hath brought me into his chambers; we will be glad and rejoice in thee; we will remember thy love more than wine; the upright love thee.*" Now we have the result, the happy fruit, of the *drawing*, and the *running*. The prayer expressed conscious weakness, and dependence, combined with holy diligence. They have run well and reached the goal; and now they are crowned with joy and gladness. But, never forget, my soul, it is grace that draws, and grace that runs, and grace that crowns, and that all flows from the shoreless ocean of the Saviour's love. "We will *remember* thy love more than wine." Now she uses the word

"*remember*," she knew His love before. But she is enjoying it with increased interest. Like air, she is surrounded with it, she is in it. "The King hath brought me into his chamber."

But why should Christ be here called "The King?" It is prophetic of His relationship with Israel after their restoration. As to His right or title, He is always that. Is He ever called the King of the Church? Not in Scripture. He is a King and worthy of all homage. But in Scripture He is spoken of as Head of His body, the Church, and as King of the Jews. And as such, observe, He came at first in lowly grace, and presented Himself to the daughter of Zion, but, alas, she refused Him. He was despised and rejected, crucified and slain, but God raised Him up, and gave Him glory, thereby making good, in resurrection, His rights and titles, not only as King of the Jews, but also as Head of His body, the Church, and centre of all coming glory. (Comp. Zech. ix., John xii., Acts ii., Eph. i., Phil. ii.) With the same breath the Jews cried, "Hosanna; Blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord," and, "Away with him, away with him! Crucify him!" Such, alas, is the brief duration of human popularity! At last they filled up the measure of their sins. Their relationship with God was broken. The Messiah was cut off—the testimony of the Holy Ghost was despised—and, for the time, all was gone, as to the kingdom.

Nevertheless, the word of the Lord shall stand fast for ever. Man's unbelief and sin can never make the faithfulness of God of none effect. In the redemption accomplished by Christ, a foundation was laid for the

future restoration of Israel, in grace, according to the changeless purpose of God; and for placing the children in the full possession and enjoyment of all the blessings promised to the fathers. "Now I say that Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to *confirm the promises made unto the fathers*." (Rom. xv. 8.) Nothing can be plainer than the predictions of God's word as to the future reign of the Lord Jesus, in connexion with the throne of David, and the whole house of Israel. Of course, His reign and His glory will not be confined to the restored tribes and the land of Israel; but Jerusalem and the cities of Judah will form the *earthly* centre of His millennial kingdom; ust as the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God, will be the *heavenly* centre of the many connecting circles of His heavenly glory. Heb. xii. 22—24.

But as our meditations are of "the King," we will dwell a little on the prophecies which reveal and unfold Him to us in this character. "For unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to stablish it with judgment and with justice, from henceforth, even for ever. *The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this*." (Isaiah ix. 6, 7.) This ancient prediction, which the zeal of the Lord of hosts will in due time perform, was, in substance, repeated to Mary by the angel. "Thou shalt bring forth a Son, and shalt call his name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be

called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end." (Luke i.) Prophecies on this subject, yet unfulfilled, are almost innumerable.

But was not Jehovah, of old, King in Jerusalem? Oh, yes; most true! From the time of Israel's deliverance out of Egypt, until the days of Samuel, Jehovah was their king. Then they desired a king like the nations around them, and rejected the Lord as their king. But this, like everything else, with Israel under the law, ended in complete failure. From the banks of the Red Sea to the cross on Calvary, or to the stoning of Stephen, we have a history of failure. And that, not only in one position or relationship, but in all. If we look at Israel as under law—as a vine brought out of Egypt and planted in the land—as the married wife, and as God's witness on the earth, we find that there was not only constant failure, but they became *incorrigible* in their sins. Hence, at last, God's righteous judgments came upon them. Their beloved Jerusalem was encompassed with armies, their temple and city razed to the ground, and those that escaped the edge of the sword, were driven by the sore displeasure of God to the four winds of heaven.

From that day to this, Israel's condition has been "forsaken and desolate." But it will not be always so. It is most needful to mark, at such a point as this, the difference between God's ways in *government* with His people, and His ways in *grace*. The Jews, in the righteous government of God, because of their sins and impenitence, have been, and still are, under His chasten-

ing hand; but the grace and love of His heart towards them remain unchangeably the same. Mark the terms of the covenant, "And I will for this afflict the seed of David, *but not for ever*." (1 Kings xi. 39.) This is a principle of immense importance, not only with Israel and the Church, but with the individual Christian. The same great principle is referred to by the apostle when he is handling the subject of Israel's rejection and restoration. "Because of unbelief they were broken off . . . . But as touching the election, they are beloved for the fathers' sakes. For the gifts and callings of God are without repentance." Rom. xi.

The present condition and future restoration of the Jews are touchingly described by the prophet Hosea, "For the children of Israel shall abide many days without a king, and without a prince, and without a sacrifice, and without an image, and without an ephod, and without teraphim. Afterward shall the children of Israel *return*, and seek the LORD their God, and *David their king*, and shall fear the Lord and his goodness in the latter days." Precious thought! They will yet "seek the Lord their God, and David their king." And what is the book of Canticles? Is it not the assurance, and the re-assurance to the remnant, of the unchanging affection of the King? Here, the God-fearing remnant in the latter days can read His love—the unwearied, unupbraiding, patient love of "the Lord their God, and David their king." In the past, all failed under law. In the future, all will be re-established under grace. In the past, they were on the ground of the conditional part of the covenant. In the future, they will be on the ground of the unconditional grace of God. The

value of the sacrifice of their once-rejected Messiah, and the fulness of the love of God, will be the measure of their blessing. But who can measure that which is immeasurable? Such will be the love of the King to His Jewish Bride.

The book of Ruth illustrates, in the most simple and touching way possible, the past, present, and future condition of Israel.

No fruit remained of the married life of Naomi. "Call me not Naomi," she says, which signifies *my delight*, but "call me Mara," *bitterness*, "for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me." Her husband, Elimelech, (which signifies, *my God is king,)* and her two sons, died in the land of Moab. Naomi was now a widow, desolate, fruitless, and, naturally, without resources. "Call me Mara . . . . . I went out full, and the Lord hath brought me home again empty." Striking type of the Jewish nation, who, having lost God as its king and husband, is now as a widow, and desolate. But a feeble remnant, in the person of the meek and lowly Ruth, clings to Naomi, and, virtually, takes shelter under the wings of the God of Israel. "Blessed are the meek; for they shall inherit the earth." The fields which she first entered as a gleaner, became her own. But the nearest kinsman-redeemer refuses to redeem the inheritance, if Ruth must be taken as his wife with it. And this is done in the presence of ten witnesses. These ten men of the city may represent the ten commandments, which were given before Christ came: but "fruit unto God," observe, is the result of our union with "him who is raised from the dead." See Rom. vii. 1—4.

Boaz (which signifies *in Him is strength*) now espouses, with all his heart, the cause of the feeble remnant of Elimelech's house. He is a type of the risen Christ, who was "declared to be the Son of God with *power* . . . . . by the resurrection from the dead." (Rom. i. 1, 4.) What makes this picture so perfectly beautiful, is the circumstance, that Ruth had no direct claim on Boaz. He was not the nearest of kin; so it was *all grace*. Israel, as well as the Gentiles, must now come into the inheritance on the ground of *pure grace*. "And Ruth bare a son . . . . . and Naomi took the child and laid it in her bosom, and became nurse unto it," and the women said, "There is a son born to Naomi." Touching scene! Lovely grace! The widow's heart is made to sing as in the days of her youth. The desolate one is become, as it were, a mother of children. The bereaved bosom is again filled with a living heir. All is joy. Here, we have prefigured, in the most lovely way, the full restoration of Israel to honour, glory, and dignity in the land. The true Boaz will, ere long, take up the cause of the God-fearing remnant, and re-establish Israel in the land, upon a new footing altogether. This is the joyous theme of numberless scriptures.

Take a sample. "And the Gentiles shall see thy righteousness, and all kings thy glory; and thou shalt be called by a *new name*, which the mouth of the Lord shall name. Thou shalt also be a crown of glory in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of thy God. Thou shalt no more be termed forsaken; neither shall thy land be termed any more desolate: but thou shalt be called Hephzi-bah, (i.e., my delight

is in thee,) and thy land Beulah, (i.e., married,) for the Lord delighteth in thee, and thy land shall be married." (Isaiah lxii.) And again, "Therefore behold I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her. And I will give her her vineyards from thence, and the valley of Achor for a door of hope; and she shall sing there as in the days of her youth, and as in the day when she came up out of the land of Egypt . . . . . and I will betroth thee unto me for ever; yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in loving kindness, and in mercies. I will even betroth thee unto me in faithfulness; and thou shalt know the Lord." (Hosea ii.) Oh! wondrous, matchless grace! The grace of God in Christ Jesus to the chief of sinners! Love is the spring. Grace flows. The lost one is found. Love is ever the same. The Lord loves Israel—He loves the Church—He loves the individual believer. Every soul that is drawn to Him He loves with a perfect love. The deeper love and joy are His. "The King hath brought me into his chambers."

Ver. 5, 6. "*I am black, but comely, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, as the tents of Kedar, as the curtains of Solomon. Look not upon me, because I am black, because the sun hath looked upon me: my mother's children were angry with me; they made me the keeper of the vineyards; but mine own vineyard have I not kept.*" The Bride has spoken of the King's embrace, His love, His name, and His chambers. Now, stirred up by something that has occurred, she calls to mind, and freely confesses, what she is in herself. At the same time, as happily affirms

what she is in His sight. Needed truth at all times, if we would preserve a well balanced mind. The more thoroughly we know the worthlessness of the flesh, the more shall we appreciate the worthiness of Christ, and the better shall we understand the work of the Holy Spirit. When the total depravity of human nature is not a settled reality in the soul, there will ever be confusion in our experience, as to the vain pretensions of the flesh, and the divine operations of the Spirit.

There is nothing good whatever in our carnal nature. The most advanced in the divine life has said, "In me, that is in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing." How sweeping! "*No good thing.*" But can it not be improved by diligence in prayer and watchfulnes? No, never: it is wholly incurable. Long, long ago, this was affirmed by the God of truth. See Gen. vi. "And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. . . . . And God said unto Noah, The end of all flesh is come before me." Now, what is the end, or the result, of *all flesh?* Why, that it is "evil," "only evil," and "evil continually;" that is, plainly, evil without any good, and evil without any cessation; and this is said of *all flesh*, observe, not of *some*, merely. So that all are included. True, in some we may find nature polished, cultivated, and refined; in others, rough, rude, and rugged, but it is carnal nature in both. We may not be able to bend a bar of iron, yet it may be so beaten out, as to become quite flexible, but it is the *same iron* still. Its appearance has changed, but its nature is the same.

Well, admitting all that to be true as to our sad

nature, why call it "needed truth and necessary to a well-balanced mind?" Because it enables us to distinguish between flesh and Spirit, and to know from which the thought, suggestion, or inclination may come. Seeing they are both in us, and the one unmixed good, and the other unmixed evil, this is all important. Endless confusion, trouble, perplexity, and, in some cases, deep melancholy, are the unhappy results of ignorance on this point. I mean the subject of the two natures. Nothing that is good can spring from our carnal nature. Suppose I meet a person who is in deep concern about his soul; and earnestly longing to know Christ and salvation. I know for certain the Holy Spirit is at work in that soul. Such desires after Christ and salvation are good, and could never spring from a nature that hates both God and Christ, and loves this world better than heaven. The soul may indeed be in great distress, and full of doubts and fears as to the issue, and even refusing to be comforted. But, in God's mind, it is saved already. And when it believes the truth it will rejoice. The good work was begun in the soul of the prodigal when first he said within himself, "I will arise and go to my father." The Spirit of God will fully satisfy every desire which He creates. Christ Himself is the perfect answer to every desire of the heart.

We learn from Holy Scripture three points of daily, practical importance: namely, that the flesh opposes the Spirit, Satan opposes Christ, and the world opposes the Father. (Gal. v.; Gen. iii.; 1 John ii.) These are our three grand enemies, hence the importance of knowing on whose side we are standing. For example; in place of perplexing myself as to where the world begins and

ends, in what is called *worldliness*, I have simply to ask, "Is it of the Father?" In hundreds of instances it would be impossible to say where *worldliness* begins and ends, by looking at the thing itself. But you may soon ascertain "if it be of the Father." And when we see that it is not of the Father the question is settled. It must be of the world. There is no *middle*, or *neutral* ground in Scripture. The same rule applies to the others. Whatsoever is not of the Spirit is of the flesh, and whatsoever is not of Christ is of Satan.

But though, in our meditations on the words of the Bride, we have run into these practical details, we by no means think that such thoughts were in her mind, Jewish experience being more of an outward, temporal, and typical character.

The *blackness* of which she speaks is *external*. It is a darkness of complexion—she is sunburnt; the warning word of the prophet has come to pass: "There shall be *burning* instead of *beauty*." (Isaiah iii. 24.) And because of this, she feels keenly the curious gaze of the daughters of Jerusalem. "Look not upon me, because I am black, because the sun hath looked upon me." The time was when the daughter of Zion was beautiful and glorious, a praise in the earth. "Thy renown," says the prophet, "went forth among the heathen for thy beauty; *for it was perfect through my comeliness, which I had put upon thee, saith the Lord God*." (Ezek. xvi.) But because of her ingratitude, and unfaithfulness, she had been reduced to the sad condition of a poor sunburnt slave. The Prophet Jeremiah also, in his "Lamentations" over the downfall of Jerusalem, describes, in the most touching man-

ner, not only what she once was, but what, through affliction and sorrow, she had become. "Her Nazarites were purer than snow, they were whiter than milk, they were more ruddy in body than rubies, their polishing was of sapphire. Their visage is blacker than a coal; they are not known in the streets; their skin cleaveth to their bones; it is withered, it is become like a stick." Well might he exclaim, in the bitterness of his soul, "How is the gold become dim? How is the most fine gold changed?" If such, oh my soul, be the awfully evil, bitter, and sorrowful fruits of sin in this world, where "mercy rejoiceth against judgment," what must they be in the world of woe, where hope perisheth, and where despair seizes upon the guilty soul? Canst thou look back to the cross and see *thy sins, all* thy sins, judged there—put away there—and buried in the grave of everlasting forgetfulness? God and faith alone know the power of that cross—and glory in its eternal efficacy. Then, judge all evil in thy heart and ways fully *now*, knowing that Christ was judged for it there. That which was imputed to Christ shall never be imputed to thee. "Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord *imputeth not iniquity*, and in whose spirit there is no guile." Psalm xxxii.

When I see that the sin which I mourn over was borne by Jesus, and that He put it away for ever by the sacrifice of Himself, all guile departs. I have no desire to hide, extenuate, or excuse my sin. It was *put away* on the cross, and is now *pardoned* on that ground. In the presence of such love and goodness, *fear* is cast out. I am free and unreserved; and I can only praise the Lord for His boundless grace to me.

The term "black" is generally used in Scripture as expressive of affliction, sorrow, and persecution. "My skin," as Job says, "is black upon me, and my bones are burned with the heat." (Chap. xxx. 30.) It is emphatically so with disobedient Israel. But here, the confession is sweetly coupled with faith in Christ, and so becomes, morally, the truthful expression of all believers. "I am black, but comely." Black as sin in myself—whiter than snow in Christ.

This will be the language of the God-fearing remnant in the latter day, who shall have passed through the depths of Jacob's trouble; for sorely scorched indeed shall they be, by the burning heat of "the great tribulation." Not only shall they suffer persecution under Antichrist, the great oppressor, but even their own brethren after the flesh shall be turned against them. "Hear the word of the Lord, ye that tremble at his word; your brethren that hated you, that cast you out for my name's sake, said, Let the Lord be glorified: *but he shall appear to your joy, and they shall be ashamed.*" Isaiah lxvi. 5.

This, we believe, is what the now joyous Bride refers to. "My mother's children were angry with me: they made me the keeper of the vineyards." Like another Ruth, the vineyards which she was compelled to toil in, become her own. And happy now in the love of her great Deliverer and rich Lord, she could freely speak of what she had passed through, and what she still was in her own eyes. "Black as the tents of Kedar—comely as the curtains of Solomon."

The sons of Ishmael, it is said, use the rough, shaggy skins of their black goats for the outward covering of

their tents. And, to the traveller's eye, they have an intensely black appearance in the desert, beneath the rays of a bright sun. And, most surely, were man, in his best estate, placed under the beams of the brighter Sun of Righteousness, blacker far than the wild Arab's tent would he be. Even of a burning lamp, as one has said, when placed in the rays of the sun, nothing can be seen but the black wick. But, oh! thrice happy thought, if the sense of our uncomeliness should still trouble us, it no longer troubles the blessed Lord. He has removed it all and for ever from His own eyes. And faith's eye sees with Him. The judgment of God, and the judgment of faith, are ever the same. Thy sins which were many *are* forgiven. The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from *all* sin.

The expression "curtains of Solomon," may have reference to the beautiful veil of king Solomon's temple: the type, we know, of the holy humanity of Jesus. All believers shall yet be conformed to the now perfect Man in heaven, the Head of the new creation. "As we have borne the image of the earthy, we *shall* also bear the image of the heavenly." (1 Cor. xv. 49.) The "Daughters of Jerusalem," here introduced, are evidently distinct from the Bride, though intimately connected with her, as may be seen from the important place they occupy in this beautiful scene. If the Bride be the representative of the beloved city, Jerusalem—the earthly capital of the great King, the daughters of Jerusalem may represent the *Cities of Judah*. Hence we can understand their presence and place on so many occasions, yet never reaching the position of the Bride in the estimation of the King. According to the

word of the Lord, Jerusalem must ever have the pre-eminence. "For now have I chosen and sanctified this house, that my name may be there for ever, and mine eyes and mine heart shall be there perpetually." 2 Chron. vii. 16.

Ver. 7. "*Tell me, O thou whom my soul loveth, where thou feedest, where thou makest thy flock to rest at noon; for why should I be as one that turneth aside by the flocks of thy companions.*" A blessed change has now taken place in the occupation of the Bride. The Bridegroom fills her eye and her heart. Self is dropped! What a mercy! It is neither black self, nor comely self, now. It is always unhappy in result to be occupied with self. Innumerable perplexities and sorrows flow from the eye looking *within*, in place of looking *out* from self and up to Christ.

There are three things, O my soul, in this beautiful verse, which will deserve thy serious meditation.

I. The earnest affection of the heart. She does not say, observe, "O thou whom my soul" *ought* to love, or even *desires* to love, but "O thou whom my soul *loveth*." There is a bright flame of love in her heart to the Person of her Lord and Saviour. She loves Himself. "Tell *me*, O *Thou*." This is nearness, "Me," "Thou,"—"Thou," "Me." Happy condition for a soul! What, my soul, knowest thou of this?

The word *appreciation* seems more fitly to express the little I know of this blessed matter, than the idea of the *sensations* of an earnest, ardent affection. What is there in existence, I inquire, that I care more for than my Saviour—that I would prefer to Him? What

is this? Is it love? Who else—what else—is loved more?

But, oh! the day draws near, when these eyes shall see the King in His glory. Then shall this cold, dull heart be ravished with His beauty, and burn for ever with a pure flame of perfect love for Him alone.

"Soon shall my eyes behold thee, with rapture, face to face;
One half hath not been told me of all thy power and grace;
Thy beauty, Lord, and glory; the wonders of thy love,
Shall be the endless story of all thy saints above."

II. She desires refreshment and nourishment—*directly* from Himself. "Tell me. . . . . .where *thou* feedest thy flock?" She goes not to the shepherds of Israel, who cared more for the fleece than the flock; but to the chief Shepherd Himself. She had been brought to Him as *King*, now she appeals to Him as *Shepherd*. Like David of old, He is the Shepherd-King; and oh! how graciously, lovingly, and tenderly, will He yet gather the now scattered sheep of Israel. Nothing can exceed the grace and beauty of the following verses. "For thus saith the Lord God, Behold I, even I, will both search my sheep, and seek them out. As a shepherd seeketh out his flock in the day that he is among his sheep that are scattered; so will I seek out my sheep, and will deliver them out of all places where they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day. And I will bring them out from the people, and gather them from the countries, and will bring them to their own land, and feed them on the mountains of Israel by the rivers, and in all the inhabited places of the country: I will feed them in good pasture, and upon the high mountains of Israel shall their fold be; there shall they lie in a good

fold, and in a fat pasture shall they feed upon the mountains of Israel. I will feed my flock, and I will cause them to lie down, saith the Lord God." Ezek. xxxiv.

III. Her heart longs after the noonday rest of His highly favoured flock. "Tell me . . . . . where thou makest *thy* flock to *rest* at noon." Personal communion, divine nourishment, and quiet rest, are the rich blessings her soul now earnestly breathes after. Wearied with the fruitless search for rest and refreshment apart from God, she longs after the green pastures and the still waters, of His love and grace. Those who have wandered on the dark mountains, uncheered by the light of God's countenance, know their dreadful barrenness. But when restoration is full and happy, the tender blade is sweeter than ever. The Bride, having tasted the blessedness of communion with the Lord, now desires that it may be increased and uninterrupted.

The thought of being suspected by others of insincerity greatly troubles her. "For why," she adds, "should I be as one that is veiled (margin) by the flocks of thy companions?" Who the "companions" are, it may be difficult to say, unless they be *under-shepherds*, who could not understand or meet her case like the Princely Shepherd Himself. He knew her heart. She could confide in His. The term "veiled" seems to convey the idea of being suspected. (Gen. xxxviii. 15.) This is very cutting to an honest, upright mind, but not uncommon. Many who profess to be the shepherds of God's sheep, can but little understand the path of one who is walking with the Lord outside of all the prescribed rules of men—who desires to please the Lord, if he should offend all else beside. There is such a thing

as an energy of love that rises above all mere human arrangements, and holds communion *immediately*, not *mediately*, with the Lord. An energy that could not tarry for the routine of human forms. Such an one is most likely to be misunderstood and misrepresented by those who move in the more beaten track. Like Hannah the mother of Samuel, who prayed with an inward, spiritual energy, which Eli, the priest of God, did not understand. But the Lord knows the motive of the heart, and the spring of the energy.

Just as the loved one was suffering in her soul from the mean suspicions of others, the Beloved appears for her comfort. This is the first time we hear the Bridegroom's voice. But oh! what grace flows out to her! What words drop from His lips! "O thou fairest among women," is the first utterance of His heart. Enough, surely, to sweeten the most bitter soul.

She might be troubled about her appearance, and about the unworthy thoughts of others; but such an assurance of His love and esteem is well fitted to remove all her troubles, and to fill her heart with boundless joy. In place of looking upon her as she is in herself, "black as the tents of Kedar," He assures her, that not only does He esteem her fair and comely, but the *fairest of the fair.*

Ver. 8. "*If thou know not, O thou fairest among women, go thy way forth by the footsteps of the flock, and feed thy kids beside the shepherds' tents.*" The Bridegroom's answer is readily and distinctly given, but nothing more. No approbation is expressed as to the questions. And most important questions, surely, they

are. Why is this? Is the Beloved not delighted in hearing such questions asked by His loved One? He does not say so, important though they be. He is delighted with herself, and assures her of His delight in the strongest terms. "O thou fairest among women." His love is unchangeably the same. Happy thought! Nothing in her ways—nothing said of her by others—can ever alter the affections of His heart for His Bride, although, alas, there are many things said and done by her that He cannot approve of. The believer, personally, is perfect in Christ, and in His sight. He is "justified from all things," but practically he is full of failure.

In the present instance, His address to herself, and His answer to her questions, breathe a different spirit. Why is this? again I ask. My soul would know the Master's mind. Oh for one bright gleam of the Holy Spirit's light on the sacred page! Then should I know, not the letter of Scripture merely, but the thoughts and feelings of the mind from whence it flows. Learn, then, O my soul, that approval is never expressed in Scripture, save when consistent with truth and holiness. Oh! how often we pray for what we have! How often we ask for light and direction as to our path, when the light of a cloudless sky shines on the way in which we should go. Naturally, the shee[illegible] n wandering creature in t e field.

Is there not something in that little word "if" which se[illegible]s to imply that He expected she would have known the pathway of His flock? As if the Lord had said,—Surely thou knowest. My mind on all these questions, as the Shepherd of Israel, lies plainly before thee. Why not read, my love, and understand? He

cannot upbraid, yet His love is faithful. As He said to Philip, "Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip?" How gently He leads! How kindly, even the rebukes of His love!

Christian fellowship, as taught in the word, is often very little thought of by young converts. They follow, generally speaking, where it will be most convenient, or most agreeable to themselves, without any exercise of conscience, as to whether they are following in the footsteps of the flock. They may be right, or they may be wrong, as to their path, but they have never prayerfully examined the word of God to ascertain His mind on the subject. Had the Church continued undivided, as it was at Pentecost, there would have been no need for such exercise and examination; but seeing the professing Church is now broken up into so many sections, it becomes every child of God to search the Scriptures, that they may know and do His holy will.

It is sorrowful to find, however, that many of the Lord's dear ones count this subject *unimportant, non-essential.* This thought, let me affectionately say to all such, never came from the Bible. It is most dishonouring to God and injurious to the soul. The trials through which we find the Bride passing, in the different parts of the book, seem entirely owing to her neglect of the instructions here given. We feel assured, that *next in importance to the soul's salvation, is church communion.* If the Christian be careless about this matter, and not exercised as to the Lord's mind he will be sure to follow his own will. And then what must the consequences be? God is robbed of His glory; His word is set aside; the Master is not followed; the Spirit is

grieved, and the soul loses its freshness. Under such circumstances, "*first* love" soon declines, and peace and joy give place to doubts and fears.

Comparatively few, we believe, long retain, in divine freshness, their first love. The lively sense of the Lord's "great love" to us, and how He has met all our necessities, is soon but feebly remembered. This is falling from our first love. And why is this? In place of going on to know the Lord more fully, and seeking only to please Him, we choose our own way, follow our own will, and thereby grieve the Holy Spirit: hence, darkness creeps over the mind, the light is, as it were, shut out, and we become feeble and uncertain about everything.

The Lord speaks of *two kinds of rest* in Mat. xi., which it may be well to notice here. "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will *give* you rest." This is the immediate gift of His love through faith in Himself. All who believe, without exception, have this rest. All our weary and fruitless efforts after salvation are brought to a close when we come to Jesus, and the heavy burden of sin under which we groaned is for ever removed. But the Lord further says, "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall *find rest* to your souls." *Rest of conscience He gives* through the forgiveness of our sins, when first we believe in Him. *Rest of heart we find* in obedience and subjection to His will. "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me . . . . . and ye shall *find rest*—rest and peace in every circumstance, however trying. This text explains why so many get into trouble of soul soon after the joys of

conversion; and why, when difficulties appear, though they may know the forgiveness of sins, they are uneasy and restless. Subjection to Christ in the details of life, both socially and ecclesiastically, and learning of Him, are lost sight of. To be under the same yoke with Christ, is to walk side by side and step by step with Him. "Take *my* yoke upon *you*." This would indeed be walking closely with the Lord, and thus would we surely "find rest," for all our weakness would fall on Him. When two are yoked together, the strong one can help the weak one along; and surely, the most feeble Christian, when under the same yoke with Jesus the Mighty One, need fear no difficulties. Nothing can be a difficulty to Him. All needless fears would vanish from His presence, and our chariot wheels would move lightly through the deepest sand of the desert.

But it will be said by some, that all this is clear enough as to individual walk and holiness, but our ecclesiastical path and position are not so plainly revealed. Nothing would be more unseemly than for young Christians to be sitting in judgment on the different denominations of professing Christians. But all may, and it is incumbent on all, both old and young, to enquire into the Lord's mind on this important matter. We have both individual and corporate responsibilities; and the word of the Lord tells us as plainly of the one as of the other.

Nothing, surely, could be plainer, on the subject of Church fellowship than Matthew xviii. 20: "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." Here we have plainly laid down the true foundation of all christian com-

munion—Christ the centre, and believers gathered to Him by the Holy Spirit. It is not said, observe, Where two or three *meet*, or where two or three *gather*, but where two or three *are* gathered. Thus referring to a gathering power, and not to the mere choice or exercise of the human will. The Holy Spirit, we all know, is the power that gathers to the name of Jesus. (John xiv., xvi.) Christ is God's centre—His Spirit, the power of gathering to that centre—His children, those that "*are* gathered." This is the Church of God. And this is what we are to search for, not in word or in spirit merely, but in an embodied form.

"I will pray the Father," said the blessed Lord, as He was about to leave His disciples, "and He will give you another Comforter, *that He may abide with you for ever;* even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him; but ye know him; for he dwelleth *with you*, and shall be *in you*." (John xiv. 16, 17.) He was *with them*, then; after Pentecost He would be *in them*. This was the new thing. Here we have the gathering, forming, and sustaining power of the Church of God. All believers are gathered to Christ as their only centre, formed into *one body*, and sustained in living unity by the indwelling of the Holy Ghost.

Observe, especially, three things with regard to the Holy Spirit's presence in the Church:—1st, "That He may abide with you *for ever*." Not for a limited time, as the Saviour Himself had been, but *for ever*. 2ndly, He dwelleth *with you*. As an assembly, He shall be "*with you*." 3rdly, And shall be *in you;* indwelling each believer *personally*. These precious truths were

afterwards plainly taught by the apostle in the epistles. "Know ye not that *your body* is the temple of the Holy Ghost, which is in you." (1 Corinthians vi. 19.) "In whom ye also are builded together for an *habitation of God through the Spirit.*" (Ephesians ii. 22.) Oh! wondrous, precious, blessed truth! The Spirit "*in you*," "*with you*," "*for ever.*" Oh! how richly dowried is the Bride of the Lamb!

We will now look for a moment at a practical illustration of Matthew xviii. 20. "Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you . . . . And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost." (John xx.) Here we have a true and lovely picture of the assembly of God. Christ in the midst—the centre—and the disciples gathered to the risen Jesus. Peace, worship, service, and the spirit of sonship characterize them.

An assembly gathered on this divine ground will not only acknowledge Christ in their midst, but the *Holy Ghost* as the Sovereign Ruler, and source of edification and comfort. Such will wait on the Lord, that they may be guided by His Spirit, to the glory of God. 1 Corinthians xii.; xiv.

With both precept and example so plainly before me, need I yet come to the Lord and ask Him where He feeds His flock? What more can He say than He has said? I may be quite unable to tell the difference between one section of the professing church and another, but I need be at no loss to ascer-

tain if either be according to the word of God so plainly revealed. Rather, then, let me ask Him to keep me from every bye-path—from following my own will; and that He would lead me by His Holy Spirit in the way of truth. But, O my soul! never forget that He has pledged Himself to be where disciples are gathered to His name. There they feed, and there they rest. His presence is enough to fill the soul to overflowing. "In thy presence is fulness of joy." The most attractive ministry—the most fascinating observances—the most loved associations, are not Christ. They may, or they may not, have His sanction. What I desire, what I need, is to be where faith can say for certain, *Christ Himself is there.*

Fairer than all the earth-born race,
Perfect in comeliness thou art;
Replenished are thy lips with grace,
And full of love thy tender heart:
God ever blest! we bow the knee,
And own all fulness dwells in Thee.

"*Feed thy kids beside the shepherds' tents.*" Having learnt the true ground and character of christian communion from the word, we are responsible to guide the young amongst us into these paths—the footsteps of the flock of God. Divine nourishment, suited both to old and young, will be found there. The lamb soon learns to follow in the footsteps of its mother, and feed on the same pasture. The Princely Shepherd of Israel cares for the lambs of His flock. "He shall feed his flock like a shepherd; he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom; and shall gently lead those that are with young." (Isaiah xl. 11.) The

feeblest of the flock were cared for when He led forth His people Israel out of Egypt, and through the deep. "Not an hoof was left behind." And food was found for all, around their tents in the morning, as they journeyed through the waste, howling wilderness.

The good Lord would have it to be so now, in the assemblies of His saints. And where the Holy Ghost is free and unhindered in His operations, He will surely provide milk for the babes, and strong meat for those who are of full age. The Church is spoken of as the "habitation," *tent*, or tabernacle of God. (Eph. ii. 22.) To this *tent* in the wilderness, where God Himself vouchsafes to dwell, we would earnestly and affectionately pray that all the lambs of Jesus may be gathered. Oh! that the presence of Jesus may have attractions for their hearts supreme to all others. Hear Him say, O my soul, "there am I in the midst of them." Oh! then, be where Jesus is! Who else, what else, could make up for His absence? What would the finest assembly on earth be without Him? Yea, what would heaven itself be without His presence? A blank! What is the wilderness with His presence? The paradise of God. Anywhere, everywhere, His presence is the place of blessing, of joy, of happiness. Oh! may God gather the many precious lambs of Jesus in these last days to the true fold of the Shepherd and Bishop of souls.

Ver. 9, 10. "*I have compared thee, O my love, to a company of horses in Pharaoh's chariots. Thy cheeks are comely with rows of jewels, thy neck with chains of gold.*" Now, He speaks of herself entirely. The

subject of the questions is dropped, His address is direct and personal. And oh! how full and free are the expressions of His admiring love. "I have compared *thee*, O *my* love . . . . *thy* cheeks are comely . . . . *thy* neck with chains."

How often the human mind invests with attractions the object of its admiration and then loves and worships its own image. Not so the divine mind: there, all is real. The Lord invests the Bride of His heart with His own attractions, and then admires her. He loved her, adored be His name, before there was anything about her to admire. This is divine. "God commendeth his love toward us, in that while we were *yet sinners*, Christ died for us." Having adorned her with His own excellencies, there is now nothing to offend His eye, or grieve His heart. "Thou art all fair, my love; there is no spot in thee." "Old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." She has the same life and position as her risen, living Lord. Oh! what dignity, glory, and blessedness!

In the greatness of His love, He "gave himself for us." And now, as the crucified and risen Jesus, we are fellow heirs with Him. "Not as the world giveth, give I unto you." (John xiv. 27.) The world gives a part and keeps a part, but Christ gives all. "The glory which thou gavest me I have given them." (John xvii. 22.) In admiring His Bride, though she is still in the wilderness, He is consistent with Himself, for she is perfect in His own perfectness. Rebekah was enriched and adorned with the jewels of Isaac, long before she reached his mother's tent.

"In Haran thus
The kindred of Rebekah wondering saw
The newly-given splendour; bracelets rich
Circled her arms; and pendant on her face
The weighty proof of Isaac's bounty shone,
In value questionless. And could she doubt,
Could any doubt, who saw her decked with these,
His covenanted love and bounteous heart,
Of whom they were the sparkling messengers?"

And of the bride of Jehovah it is said, "I decked thee also with ornaments, and I put bracelets upon thy hands, and a chain on thy neck. And I put a jewel on thy forehead, and earrings in thine ears, and a beautiful crown upon thy head. Thus wast thou decked with gold and silver . . . . And thy renown went forth among the heathen for thy beauty; for it was perfect through my comeliness, which I put upon thee, saith the Lord God." Ezekiel xvi.

Ver. 11. "*We will make thee borders of gold with studs of silver.*" A *chain* of gold, we know, is the token of promotion, high favour, and dignity, as in the case of Joseph and Daniel. But what meaneth these wonderful words of the King? He has been admiring His Bride—her "rows of jewels"—her "chains of gold," and now He is moved to do yet more for her: "*We* will make *thee* borders of gold with studs of silver."

Some have thought that the mystery of the Holy Trinity may be referred to in the plural "We." In the works of creation it was said, "Let *us* make man in our own image, and after our own likeness." And in the work of redemption, we know, the opportunity came for the manifestation of the different Persons of the

Godhead. "If a man love me," says Jesus, "he will keep my words; and my Father will love him, and *we* will come unto him and make our abode with him." And of the *Spirit* He says, "Ye know him, for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you." John xiv.

But what are we to understand by "borders of gold with studs of silver?" May it not be a crown that is spoken of? A crown of gold bespangled with silver? Ezekiel seems to say it is. "And I put a jewel on thy forehead, and earrings in thine ears, and a beautiful crown on thine head. *Thus* wast thou decked with *gold* and *silver*." What then? Shall the restored, royal tribe of Judah yet wear this beautiful crown in the land of Israel — in the holy city Jerusalem? Wondrous grace! Love divine! And will it be the united gift of the adorable Trinity?

Can Judah fail to remember, or can I ever forget, that Thy royal brow, O King of Salem, was once, in those very scenes, wreathed with a crown of thorns? No earthly jewels lustred that crown. But the rich ruby-drops from Thy holy veins were its jewels of imperishable value. Awake! awake, O my soul! meditate on the grace and love of Jesus. What wilt thou think, how wilt thou feel, when that once-pierced hand places on thy head a garland of unfading glory? Shall thine eye be caught with the crown, or be dazzled with the glory? Oh no! the first glimpse of that "countenance transcendant" shall fix thine eye, and ravish thy heart for ever!

There is always something, in the *manner* of the Lord's love most grateful to the heart. He says to *herself* what is in His mind. This meets the first desire

of love—personal communion. Well does Jesus know how to fill the heart with deepest joy. But will it always be so? Yes, yes, O my soul! His love shall endure for ever. He changeth not. He is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. In the past, the present, and the future, He is the same. But oh! how the heart delights in being so immediately, so individually, so distinctly addressed by Himself. Amongst the myriads of the redeemed, not one is overlooked, or neglected by Him. "He loved *me*, and gave Himself for me," will be the thrilling note in the song of all. His love, in its eternal sweetness and fulness, fills all hearts to overflowing, and turns all *hearts* into *harps* of sweetest melody, to sound for ever his un-beginning, never-ending love.

Love that no tongue can teach,
Love that no thought can reach;
No love like His.
God is its blessed source,
Death ne'er can stop its course,
Nothing can stay its force;
Matchless it is.

There is divine wisdom, and instruction for the soul, in the selection of His first comparison. "I have *compared* thee, O my love, to a company of horses in Pharaoh's chariots." The mystic Bride of the true Solomon is here reminded of *Egypt*, out of which He redeemed her with an outstretched arm; and of "Pharaoh," from whose iron grasp He rescued her. Most suggestive references to the children of Israel, and, morally, to us. The truth of God is a circle. The love that delivered us out of Egypt, that brings us into

Canaan, with all its mercies by the way, is a perfect unbroken circle of grace and truth. And, moreover, every part of that circle shall be held in everlasting remembrance. The grace that meets us in the world, conducts us to the heart of God, its native fountain. "But now, in Christ Jesus, ye who sometimes were far off, are made nigh by the blood of Christ." Ephesians ii. 13.

The chariot-horse, with its gorgeous trappings, may be the symbol of strength, symmetry, swiftness, royalty, and willingness in service. No sooner has the charioteer taken his seat, than his steeds are in readiness to move off. They become impatient of delay, the raising of the foot, the movement of every muscle, plainly tell him, that if he be ready, they are quite ready. And then, how subject, notwithstanding their power, to the slightest touch of the guiding rein. Seest thou, O my soul, in this ready, willing service, a fair representation of thine own? Is it so? Or, alas! what? No swiftness—no symmetry—no consistency—no subjection to the guiding hand. What! Is it so? Examine all thy ways beneath the glance of the Master's eye. Is there one thing on earth that thou wouldst dread more, than to be turned out of His service? Remember, O remember! that though as a son thou shalt be in thy Father's house for ever—as a sinner saved by grace, thou art saved for ever—still, as a servant, if thou art idling thy time, or spoiling thy work, it may be taken from thee and given to another. O most patient Master, keep thy servant ever girded, obedient, and ready for service; and caring only to meet Thy mind.

Ver. 12. "*While the King sitteth at his table, my spikenard sendeth forth the smell thereof.*" There is an infinite difference between the attractions of nature, and the grace of the Spirit. Hast thou well considered this, my soul? Honey, the sweetness of nature, was forbidden to be used in the sacrifices. A little of it, from the end of a rod, may enlighten the eyes, and refresh the heart of the warrior in the day of battle, but it can never refresh the heart of the Lord of hosts. Its amiable qualities are truly valuable for the family, the social circle, and the world at large, but totally unfit for God's altar or the King's table. Both the sweetness and the sourness of nature are alike rejected by the Holy One of Israel. "So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God." Rom. viii. 8.

We must have a new nature, even the life of the risen Jesus in the soul, before we can do anything to please God, or bring an acceptable offering to Him. "Ye must be born again." "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance." (Gal. v. 22, 23.) The divine life, bearing fruit by the Holy Spirit, is the most fragrant and refreshing of all fruits to the Saviour of sinners. The "spikenard," to Him, has "an odour of a sweet smell," and its virtue endureth for ever. (Phil. iv.) The alabaster box of spikenard, that once filled with richest odours the presence chamber of Bethany, has not yet lost its fragrance to Jesus. "She hath done what she could," was the immediate, unmeasured commendation of His love. And "Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, this also that she hath done shall be spoken of as a memorial of her."

"Love is the truest providence,
Since beyond time her gold is good,
Stamped for man's mean "*three hundred pence*,"
With Christ's "*She hath done what she could.*"

It is a mistake to suppose, that we have nothing to present to the King while he sitteth at His table. True, of His own we give Him; but it is all the sweeter to both on that account. What is sweeter than grace? The Israelite was to bring a basketful of his first ripe fruits and present it to the Lord his God. (Deut. xxvi.) True worship is communion, fellowship. If the Bridegroom has His "good ointments," the Bride has her "spikenard;" yet it is all grace. The table is His—the ointment and spikenard too are His. "Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil: my cup runneth over." Psalm xxiii.

The heart never rises to the point of worship until it runs over. Then it has nothing to ask for. True worship is the overflowing of the heart. And oh, how sweet, how precious, how blessed it is! When the Holy Spirit ministers of the fulness of Jesus to our souls, how soon the heart runs over. And this overflowing of the heart, with the fulness of Christ, is true, heavenly worship. Hence the important difference between a prayer, and a worship meeting. We should come to the former with empty vessels, and so cry to the Lord, as if we would storm the heavens, rather than go away without our answer. But to the latter, we should come thoroughly self-judged, well prepared to feast on the King's dainties—the spoils of His victory—the fruits of redemption. Thus shall we find our every need met, and our every desire satisfied. And have we nothing to ask for at the

table? Nothing, unless the King has forgotten something you need—except it be for a *larger heart*. To be in the presence chamber of the Lord—the holiest of all—and to be feasting on the rich provisions of His table; what can we be but *satisfied?* what can we do but praise, admire, adore, love, and worship the Lord our God and Father?

The Bride has now reached the highest place of blessedness. She is peacefully enjoying the presence of the King, while he is reclining at His table. The activities of service have given place to the repose of worship. The burning sun—the persecution—the poverty—the sorrow, are all forgotten in the fulness of that joy which His presence gives. And now, the box is broken, the spikenard flows, the fragrance fills the house, the head and the feet of Jesus are anointed, and His heart is ravished with the advances of her love.

Ver. 13. "*A bundle of myrrh is my well-beloved unto me; he shall lie all night betwixt my breasts.*" If the chariot-horse suggests the thought of *willing service*, and the "spikenard" be the symbol of *divine worship*, may not the "bundle of myrrh" be the emblem of a daily and hourly testimony for Christ? And what more natural, as a consequence of deep and solid communion with the Lord? Is not the heart strengthened for testimony in such happy seasons? Uninteresting and powerless will all our services become, if personal communion be neglected. How was it that David displayed such courage in the valley of Elah? Was it the rashness of youthful inexperience? O no, not at all! His faith, through communion in secret, had been

raised to the very thoughts of God Himself about his people. Hence his valour in the open field. "Blessed be the Lord my strength," he could sing, "which teacheth my hands to war, and my fingers to fight." Ps. cxliv. 1.

We are taught the same truth by our blessed Lord in John vii. 37, "In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto *me*, and *drink*." In vain shall we seek to become the means of refreshing and blessing to others, unless we drink, and drink daily and deeply, at the fountain-head for ourselves. Every fresh testimony for Christ, should be the result of fresh communion with Him. Oh! how needful for the servants of the Lord to remember this. Forget it not, O my soul, but like Moses in the land of Midian, *sit down by the well*—the well of living waters. "And he sat down by a well." (Exodus ii.) Thus close to the well, he was in a position to be helpful to the seven daughters of the priest of Midian and to his flock. This scene may speak of Christ opening the fountain of redeeming love to His Bride, but surely it is a most instructive lesson for an evangelist! Oh! to be thus, in heart near to the well of life—heaven's water springs, and so become the channel of these living waters to others.

"Whom have we, Lord, but Thee,
Soul thirst to satisfy,
Exhaustless spring! the waters free!
All other streams are dry."

The heart of the spouse, like the woman at the well of Sychar, is overflowing. She must spread abroad the glory of her Saviour's name. More precious to her heart than a bundle of this costly spice to the merchant

is her well-beloved. "A bundle of myrrh is my well-beloved unto me." Blessed appreciation of Christ! Happy fruit of nearness, in communion, to Him! And mark, too, my soul, the affection which He creates in the heart. She can say in truth, "my well-beloved." Oh! happy, privileged spouse! I wonder not at thy holy and good resolution, "He shall lie all night betwixt my breasts." There, nearest to her heart, she places her sweet-smelling myrrh—her disinfecting spice. And now, wherever she goes, the odour of her precious treasure is spread abroad.

A bundle, or *little bag*, of myrrh, carried in the bosom, scents the garments, and diffuses its fragrance all around, whether at home or abroad, at work or resting, in the sanctuary or the social circle, silently but surely, the fragrance of the perfume, like the air, fills the scene. And even after the person has left, the sweet odour remains, as a testimony to the value of that which lay nearest her heart. Oh! exquisite emblem! Is this thy faithfulness to Jesus, O my soul? Does He lie embalmed in thy heart, and does the sweet savour of His name go with thee, whithersoever thou goest, and remain when thou art gone? Soul-searching truth! "Occupy till I come," were the farewell words of the rejected Jesus to His disciples; and over the memorials of His dying love, He has written in wondrous grace, "This do in remembrance of me." He has not asked us to do some great thing for Him, or to lay on His altar some costly sacrifice? No; but simply to be occupied with Himself as earth's rejected Christ, during His absence, and to give Him a place in our hearts. "Remember me," was His last request—think

of Me—refer everything in your hearts to Me. Have we done so? Have *I* done so? Do I now do so? Has the affianced Bride of the Lamb thus placed Him in her bosom, and carried Him there during the long, long dark night of His absence? Alas, alas, the requests of thy love have been forgotten! Rivals have been admitted and entertained; and sorrowful it is to find thee outside, in thine unwearied love, knocking at the door, until, in the mystic language of the Song of Songs, thy head is filled with dew, and thy locks with the drops of the night. "But the night is far spent, the day is at hand." Yes, the happy day draws near, when, through thy patient grace, the affections of thy heavenly and earthly people shall perfectly answer to thine own.

Thine eye in that bright cloudless day,
Shall, with supreme delight,
Thy fair and glorious Bride survey,
Unblemished in thy sight.

Ver. 14. "*My beloved is unto me as a cluster of camphire from the vineyards of En-gedi.*" The bundle of myrrh is hidden from the eye in the breast, but the cluster of camphire is an object for the eye, and carried openly in the hand. Myrrh is the living juice of the tree, which flows in drops through broken parts of the bark, something like blood from the veins, or tears from the eye.

"As myrrh new bleeding from the tree,
Such is a dying Christ to me."

The flowers of the camphire tree grow in dense clusters and are beautiful as well as fragrant. "That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith," is the prayer of the apostle. And we are to be "Always bearing about

in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body." 2 Cor. iv. 10.

How widely different the line of thought suggested by a tree in full blossom, and one, wounded and bruised, and the life-juice flowing from its veins. The one is the symbol of death, the other the power of life. The tender bud, finding its way through the hard bark of winter, is always a striking and interesting illustration of resurrection; the blossoms and the fruit are the manifestations of the power of life and of rich blessings to man. The little seed that is cast into the ground, and upon which the clods are heaped, may seem for a time hopelessly lost; but the reviving spring comes round, and through the energy of life, every surrounding circumstance is mastered; the tender blade appears, and in due time waves its golden grain in triumph over them all.

How sweetly all this, and more than this, was shadowed forth in Aaron's rod that budded, through the intervention of God in grace. (Num. xvii.) In one night the dry rod of Aaron—a piece of dead wood—budded, bloomed, and bore fruit. Precious type of the risen Jesus, fruitful now in resurrection! Here in types and shadows, we are taught that we need the risen Jesus, as our Great High Priest to take us through the wilderness and into the land of Canaan. Grace reigns in Priesthood and saves the people. Nothing short of the priestly ministry of Jesus can meet our need. He who died to *make* us clean, now lives to *keep* us clean. (John xiii. 1—17.) He is both our sacrifice and our priest. The blood of atonement, and the water

of purification, both flowed from the wounded side of Jesus.

How lovely to the eye as well as fragrant to the heart is our risen, exalted, and glorified Lord! His Person —His ministry—His relationships are infinitely precious and ever the same. "My beloved is white and ruddy; the chiefest among ten thousand. . . . . yea, he is altogether lovely." (Chap. v.) "For in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily." (Col. ii. 9.) The fulness of grace and glory dwell in Him. "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth." (Col. iii. 1, 2.) Oh! what clusters of attractions are there, had we only eyes to see them, and hearts to value them!

The vineyards of En-gedi, we are told, were celebrated for their rich fruits, and costly spices. That which is beautiful to the eye, sweet to the taste, and fragrant to the senses, was to be found there in abundance. And famous too, are these scenes, as having furnished a hiding place for David and his men when persecuted by Saul. (1 Sam. xxiv. 1—4.) The fruitful valleys below, and the strongholds in the mountains around, provided both shelter, nourishment, and refreshment, for God's anointed King, and those who had cast in their lot with him.

Yet, oh! how faintly do all the good things of earth shadow forth the unsearchable riches of Christ. All abundance comes from Him. There is nothing rich that He has not enriched—nothing sweet that He has not sweetened—nothing full that He has not filled, and yet

all that we now know of His fulness, is but as a drop to the ocean. Every good thing cometh down from above; and all speak of Him. The really good thing that is found in the creature, reminds thee, O my soul, of Him, in whom all perfection centres, as the Man Christ Jesus—God with us. As thou walkest in the field or in the garden, in the valley or on the mountain, or in thy usual round of daily duty; every second thought may be of the "well beloved" absent One. The bleeding myrrh and the blooming camphire, may well recall to thy mind the cross and the glory, and lead thee to think of Him "who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification." Rom. iv. 25.

No tree ever bore such fruit for God and man as the cross of Calvary. There, sin was put away according to the claims of the glory of God; and there, too, the enemy was vanquished and his whole power completely destroyed. The cross is the foundation of our pardon, peace, reconciliation, acceptance, and every blessing, both in time and in eternity. It is the procuring cause of all. There, God has been revealed in perfect love, and perfect righteousness. As hating sin, yet loving the sinner. Love triumphed in the cross; yet holiness and justice, truth and righteousness, were displayed and glorified. On this solid foundation, the chief of sinners is fully and freely forgiven, the same moment he believes in Christ; and his pardon is as perfect as the work of the cross. Sin, and sins, were "put away" on the cross —by the blood of Jesus; and on that ground, the sin of our nature, and the many sins of the life, are all forgiven through faith in that precious blood.

Faith can say, in holy triumph, "He was delivered

for our offences." And where are they? Abolished—gone—and gone for ever. "He made an end of sin." He who died for our sins, has been "raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father," and that is the eternal settlement of the question of sin. "He was raised again for our justification." The risen Jesus is God's own witness that the believer is justified. This is faith's sure, unfailing ground. All is peace. "It is finished." Christ is risen.

And now for the consequences of faith—the many and fragrant clusters of richest blessing to the soul. "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ. By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God . . . . . And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the reconciliation." Rom. v. 1—11.

Ver. 15. "*Behold, thou art fair, my love; behold, thou art fair, thou hast doves' eyes.*" What is it, some will ask, that can make one, defiled and deformed by sin, thus "fair" to the eye of Jesus? Where, when, how, an it be found? This is all that is needed to fill to overflowing the soul's cup of happiness! What would all the riches, honours, and glories of this world be, compared with hearing such words from such lips! "Behold, thou art fair, my love." Most truly, this is the soul's ineffable blessedness! The gospel of the grace of God, my friend, gives the answer to thy question. Know then, that when a soul is drawn to Jesus, it is received by Him, and placed in the light of God's

presence, in the full value of His finished work, and in the matchless beauty of His adorable Person.

This is grace—the grace of God in the gospel of His Son to every one that believeth. "*All that believe are justified.*" And *all* that believe are "accepted in the Beloved," through the accomplished work of the cross. (Eph. i., ii.) His precious blood cleanseth from *all sin.* (1 John i.) Then, oh, how "fair!" "Let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us." (Psalm xc. 17.) What perfection of beauty this must be! "The beauty of the Lord our God." How fair for the courts above! The beauty of angels will be perfect after their own order, but the sinner saved by grace shall shine in the beauty of the Lord for ever.

All this, I think, I can believe, some may reply, but oh, can such a place—can such blessing ever be mine? "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved," is heaven's answer to every anxious enquirer—is heaven's declaration of perfect grace to all. Believe in Jesus, trust in Him, defiled and deformed as thou art, and sooner far than thy thoughts can turn from one subject to another, thou art altogether "fair" in His sight. "Only believe." The work is finished "long, long ago." Oh! beware of that "deadly doing!" The gospel seems too simple to admit of explanation. It is a report to be believed—an invitation to be accepted—a voice of love beseeching thee to be reconciled to God—a proclamation of pardon and peace by Jesus Christ. (Acts x. 36; xiii. 38, 39.) Not, observe, the *promise* of pardon and peace, but the *preaching* of pardon and peace. This makes a wonderful difference. And observe, further, that it is neither by

law nor *promise* that the soul is thus richly blessed; but by *Jesus Christ.* The moment thou hast faith in Him, thy forgiveness, justification, and reconciliation, are proclaimed by the truth of God.

Take one example, as an illustration of the ways of God, in grace, with sinners. In the third chapter of Zechariah, we see Joshua standing before the Lord. He is a type of God's dealings, in grace, with Jerusalem in the latter day. This chapter is the history, I believe, of how the Bride of the King is so "fair" in His sight. This is important as to our present question. It is also the history of every sinner saved by grace. Joshua is clothed in filthy garments. Satan is there to resist him. He always seeks to hinder the blessing of souls. But the Lord shelters the defenceless one. He casts out none that come to Him. He rebukes and silences the adversary; and speaks and acts for Joshua. This He always does. Be of good courage. The filthy garments are taken away; his sins are all forgiven. There is not a rag left for Satan to lay hold on. Thus cleansed from all his defilements, "He is clothed with a change of raiment." The robe of God is put upon him. And now, how "fair!" But this is not all. A fair mitre is set upon his head. Surely "The beauty of the Lord our God" is now upon him! He is what God, in "the exceeding riches of His grace," has made him. "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood. And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever, Amen." Both the kingly and the priestly crown are ours—ours in His right. This is their glory! Highest in dignity, be-

longing to royalty. Nearest in worship, belonging to priesthood. And oh! how sweet the thought, the work is all of God from first to last, and so can never fail. "The Lord hath chosen Jerusalem . . . . Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire? . . . . I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee . . . . I will clothe thee with change of raiment . . . . And I said, Let them set a fair mitre on his head." It is all of God—by Christ Jesus through the work of the cross. "Without shedding of blood is no remission." Grace reigns—God is glorified—faith triumphs—Satan is confounded, and the sinner eternally saved.

This know also, my dear friend, that if thy desire after Christ, and after the enjoyment of His favour be true and sincere, there must already be grace in thy heart. The desire must come from Him. Where there is nothing more than mere nature, there can be no longing desire for the blessed Lord and His favour. Faith, salvation, and desire, go together, although the timid believer will often hesitate to say, "He is all my salvation and all my desire." The clearest evidence of divine life in the soul, is when the heart is occupied with Him, the link of connection is formed and can never be broken; faith alone enters into its blessedness. Oh! rest, abide in Him.

Being associated with the risen Jesus, we are one with Him in resurrection. (Eph. ii.) This gives us our wondrous place in His sight. All who are brought into this new—this resurrection-state, are *fair* even as Christ is *fair*. Only that in all things He has the pre-eminence; as it is written, "Thou art *fairer* than the children of men." Hence we find the same

terms of endearment and admiration applied to both. And the same things said of both; the Bride being the reflection of the Bridegroom. If the garments of the Bride are scented with myrrh, it is said of the Bridegroom, "All thy garments smell of myrrh, and aloes, and cassia." What a blessed theme this great truth opens up for meditation! *Oneness with Christ, as risen and glorified!* How little the world in all its relationships and associations would seem, did we look at them from this point of view!

What is here said of Israel, or of the remnant, *prophetically*, ("Behold, thou art fair, my love,") is true now in a deeper sense, of the Church of God, the Bride of the Lamb. At the same time, the great principle of the song is common to both. The *Lord's* love is perfect. He loves Israel; He loves the Church; and in due time He will create those affections in the hearts of both, which will perfectly answer to His own. Hence, the moral value and application of this book to the Christian, is of great importance. It is the fellowship of hearts. Still, it is always well to keep in view, the difference between what will be the place of the Jew in the latter day, and what the place of the Christian *now* is.

Although the marriage of the Lamb has not yet come, the relationship between Christ and the Church is already formed. As the apostle says, "I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ." (2 Cor. xi. 2.) Blessed truth! The espoused of the Saviour, the Son of the Father! But knowest thou, O my soul, the affections belonging to this near and dear relationship? In place of a pain-

ful uncertainty, which often agitates the minds of those who are only looking forward to relationship, hast thou the calm, peaceful affection and joy, which naturally flow from a settled union? If so, the desire of thy heart will be great for thy Lord's return. Affection is the true ground of the cry, "Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly."

The Bridegroom further adds in His present address, "Thou hast *doves' eyes*." Our associations with the *dove* in scripture, are of the most instructive kind. From the eighth chapter of Genesis down to New Testament times, it occupies an interesting place in the word. On our first acquaintance with the *dove*, we find it in connection with the *ark* of God and the *olive* tree. Precious types of the salvation and the peace of God! She plucked, and held fast, the olive leaf, when the judgments of God covered the earth. And while the waters were unabated, it could find no rest for the sole of its foot, until it returned to the ark. The world under judgment was no place for it. Again, we find, the *dove* alone, of all the feathered tribe, was offered in sacrifice under the law, and thereby typified the Lord Himself. The same type serves for both Christ and His Spouse. Wondrous unity! "For as the body is one and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body; *so also is Christ*." (1 Cor. xii. 12.) Mark, the apostle is speaking of that which is a figure of the Church, but in place of concluding, "so also is the Church," he adds "*so also is Christ*." He sees the Church in Him. They are *one body*.

The Holy Spirit is also typified by the *dove*. "And John bare record saying, I saw the Spirit descending

from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him." It is also said, that when the dove is absent from its mate, it sits solitary and mourns. "I did mourn like a dove." And, "We mourn sore like doves." (Isa. xxxviii. 14; lix. 11.) Simplicity, purity, harmlessness, faithfulness, seem to be represented by the dove. When the eye of the Christian is single, chaste, and constantly fixed on Christ, then may it be said, "Thou hast doves' eyes."

Ver. 16, 17. "*Behold, thou art fair, my beloved, yea, pleasant; also our bed is green. The beams of our house are cedar, and our rafters of fir.*" There is great beauty in this rejoinder. The bride speaks not of herself, she hears the expressions of His admiring love, but says nothing about herself. Not even that she is *unworthy* of such love. However deep her emotions, self is passed over. This is true humility. We may speak of bad self, and unworthy self, and the heart be full of pride. True humility speaks not of self at all, either good or bad. But this is a hard lesson to learn. Christ is our only perfect example. The blessed Lord humbled Himself. He took the lowest place. The first Adam exalted himself, and he was abased. The last Adam humbled Himself, and God highly exalted Him. Follow Jesus, then, O my soul! Wait thou only upon God; trust in Him. "For every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted." (Luke xviii. 14.) This is a principle of wide application; it reaches to all the details of life, and is of immense practical importance. Learn its working perfectly in the two Adams. See it daily exemplified in the two natures. Poor human nature is

ever ready to listen to the lie of the tempter, "Ye shall be as gods." But the divine nature is content with the place wherein God has set it, until He says, "Come up higher."

But what of the old nature in the Christian? The Scriptures say plainly, that it came to its end on the cross. "*Ye are dead*," is plain enough. "And they that are Christ's *have crucified the flesh* with the affections and lusts." And again, "I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." (Col. iii.; Gal. ii.) Were we to walk in the light and power of this great foundation truth, humility would characterize us. The flesh, in its vanity and assumption, would be mortified; and the meek and lowly spirit of Jesus would be manifested.

The bird that soars on highest wing,
Builds on the *ground* her lowly nest;
And she that doth most *sweetly* sing,
Sings in the *shade* when all things rest.
In Lark and Nightingale we see,
What honour hath humility.

When Mary chose the *better* part,
She meekly sat at Jesu's *feet*.
And Lydia's gently opened heart
Was made for God's own temple meet.
Fairest and best adorned is she,
Whose clothing is humility.

The saint that wears heaven's brightest crown
In *humble* adoration bends;
The weight of glory bows him down,
Then most, when most his soul ascends.
Nearest the throne must ever be,
The footstool of humility.

When Christ is a complete covering to the eye, contentment fills the heart. We can afford to take the lowest place. Everything needed to make us happy is found in Him. He is not only *fair* to the eye, but *pleasant* to the heart. Many are *fair* that are not *pleasant*, and many are *pleasant* that are not *fair*, but Christ is both. "Behold, thou art fair, my beloved, yea, pleasant." Oh! what combinations—what perfections—what harmonies are found in Jesus! Here, and here alone, the heart can find rest. Quiet, perfect rest. Hence the Bride most significantly adds, "Also our bed is green." The green pastures, and the still waters of Jehovah's plenteous grace, have long been familiar to our minds, as the expressive symbols of the repose and refreshment of the sheep of Christ, under His shepherd care. "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures; he leadeth me beside the still waters." "Pastures of tender grass . . . . waters of quietness," are the daily fare of those whose feet are found "by the footsteps of the flock." But the shepherd never pitches his tent inside the walls of the city. There is no tender budding grass—no waters of quietness there. Outside the dingy walls, in the rural scenes, He rests His flock. "The city," doubtless, in this book, is typical of the world, the country of heavenly places. Only shame and sorrow befall the Bride when she is beguiled into the city. The Bridegroom is never found there, His favourite retreats are the vineyards, the gardens, the mountains of myrrh, the hills of frankincense, and the valleys where the lilies bloom.

But there is one word in these closing sentences,

which indicates full, conscious, happy fellowship with the "well-beloved." I mean that little word "our," "*our* bed is green," "*our* house," "*our* rafters." It is like the precious little "us," "we," and "with," in the Epistle to the Ephesians. Oh! happy union—blessed unity, "our, us, we, with." Eternal oneness with Christ! One in life, one in righteousness, one in acceptance, one in peace, one in rest, one in joy, one in heavenly, eternal glory!

Joyless indeed would be the fairest scenes of earth, and joyless, too, would be the house of many mansions, without the presence of the blessed Lord—the divine Bridegroom of the heart. But the sure word of promise is, "And so shall we ever be *with the Lord*." And again, "that where I am, there ye may be also." Enough! O Lord! It is enough! With Thee and like Thee! Consider this, my soul! Here is perfect rest for thee—calm repose. With Thee, and like Thee, O Lord, for ever, in the Paradise of God—in the house of many mansions, fill up the full measure of our eternal happiness, dignity, and glory.

With Him I love, in spotless white,
In glory I shall shine;
His blissful presence my delight,
His love and glory mine.
All taint of sin shall be removed,
All evil done away;
And I shall dwell with God's beloved
Through God's eternal day.

CHAPTER II.

Ver. 1. "*I am the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valleys.*" What a wondrous thing *grace* is—the grace of God to sinners! What mighty changes it effects in those who know it, as to their thoughts, objects, desires, and affections. It gives us the mind of the Lord as to what we are in His sight, and to His heart. Here, mark it well, my soul, and meditate deeply thereon. The fountain is deep, drink freely.

To know grace, is to know God, and His full salvation by Jesus Christ, through the teaching and power of the Holy Spirit. But a little while ago, and the Bride was confessing, "I am black . . . . black as the tents of Kedar," and now, through grace, she can say, and say in truth, nothing doubting, "I am the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valleys"—the very crown and ornament of Sharon—the very beauty and sweetness of the valleys. And mark, too, that she says, "*The* rose . . . . *the* lily." She speaks not in general terms of her attractions to the Bridegroom, but in the most definite way. She is not vainly boasting to others of what she is, but addressing Himself directly, in the happy consciousness of her own place in His heart. There is full communion, for He immediately adds, "As *the* lily among thorns, so is *my* love among the daughters." And further on in the book, He says plainly, "My dove, my undefiled, is *but one*, she is the *only one* of her mother, she is the *choice one* of

her that bare her." Such is the *distinguishing* love and grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and such is the special place which the Bride has in His sight. He always goes beyond her in the expression of affection. This is most blessed to the heart. How widely different is the beautiful, fragrant lily to the lacerating thorn!

There are many who say, when they hear such truth, "O, I am not worthy of such a place." Quite true, if you speak of your own worthiness. But what place do you think you are worthy of? If not this one, an inferior one, I suppose. But is this humility? No, friend, it is pride of heart. We are worthy of no place at all in His presence. Consequently, any place there, must be pure, sovereign grace. To be within the threshold, would be as pure grace, as to be on the throne.

The prodigal son, no doubt, thought that it would be very humble in him to say, "Make me as one of thy hired servants." But this was remaining pride and legality of heart, not humility. All such thoughts spring from the natural heart which is essentially proud and legal, and utterly ignorant both of its own condition and of the grace of God. True humility is seen standing afar off, and confessing that it is not worthy to lift up so much as its eyes to heaven. (Luke xviii.) The prodigal had no more title to be received as a servant than as a son. He had forfeited all claim on the ground of righteousness. He had but one plea to offer; viz., his *pressing need*. He could only be met in grace. Had he been met in righteousness, he would have been condemned for ever. But grace reigns; nothing is said about his sins. He could not have answered for one of a thousand. The question of sin

was settled between God and Christ on the cross. And now, grace shines, and shines in all its heavenly brightness. The Father's heart is the spring, and He has His own joy in it all. He acts from Himself, and as Himself. The prodigal's pre-meditated speech is interrupted; he never gets to the part which says, "Make me as one of thy hired servants." How could he? Grace prevents; the Father ran to meet him, fell on his neck and kissed him. Reconciliation is expressed and accomplished the moment they meet. He receives the kiss of peace at once; grace is free. God having received the atonement on the cross, we receive the reconciliation the moment we meet Him in Christ.

And now, being reconciled through the blood of the cross, the once lost, ruined, and degraded one, is made a son and an heir—an heir of God and a joint heir with Christ. This is grace—the grace of God in Christ Jesus, to all who believe in His name. And, further, the same one shall shine in grace, and be the vessel of its display throughout the countless ages of eternity. As age after age rolls on in countless numbers, those who have been the subjects of that grace in time, shall continue to shine in its ever-increasing brightness. Oh! what place for the once poor, friendless, homeless, outcast one to occupy, and that for ever. But God is establishing His character for grace, and such are the suited vessels for its glorious and eternal display, in the house of many mansions. "That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of His grace, in His kindness towards us through Christ Jesus." Eph. ii. 7.

Ver. 3. "*As the apple-tree among the trees of the wood so is my Beloved among the sons. I sat down under his*

shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste." Learned men have searched and written much, endeavouring to ascertain the particular kind of *rose* and *lily* that are referred to in the first verse, and the particular kind of *tree* in the third. Most say that what is here called "The rose of Sharon," belongs to the lily tribe, and should be translated, "The *Narcissus* of Sharon." Many different opinions have also been given as to the particular flower here meant by the "lily." And many good and learned men have thought, that in the first verse we have the voice of the Bridegroom, not of the Bride. And many, alas, who have written, and written much, have been more occupied with the flowers than the persons. But surely in the second verse, the Bridegroom owns the speaker in the first verse to be His *loved one*. "As the *lily* among thorns, so is *my love* among the daughters." All are agreed that this is the voice of the Beloved. In the first verse, we have no doubt, the Bride is the speaker. She is acknowledging in the joy of communion, what He in His grace has made her; that all her beauty in His sight, as well as the affections of her heart for Himself, are His own creation. And in comparing herself with these beautiful flowers, she is only repeating what He Himself has taught her.

But mark well, my soul, that she says, "I am the lily of the *valleys*"—not of the *cities*. In the quiet vale she finds her native soil and breathes her native air. There she blooms, for the eye of her Beloved, and sheds her fragrance for his refreshment. "He feedeth among the lilies." It was in the *city* where she lost the joys of His presence; and where she was insulted and un-

veiled by the watchmen. These were her wandering, backsliding moments. Oh! how much better for her, had she never left her native valleys! My soul, here pause a little. Meditate on these things. At a distance —far from the stream and spirit of this world—in heart far from its attractions, study that which will be pleasing to the eye of Jesus, and refreshing to His heart. Oh! wondrous truth! that He who is seated on the throne of God in heaven, and surrounded with its glory, should yet think at all of such good-for-nothing ones as we are, and, most of all, to be pleased and delighted, or grieved and wounded, by the character of our ways! Alas! that He should be so frequently wounded in the house of His friends! Oh! is there one thing under the sun, that should give thee such unfeigned pleasure, as to please Him? Canst thou think of anything more unworthy of a Christian, than his seeking to please himself, and to find pleasure in the things of the world? Especially when he knows, as men speak, that it is to grieve the heart of One, whom only he should find his supreme delight in pleasing—the One who died for him on Calvary.

Having well judged thy heart and ways on this solemn subject, let thy care, love, and sympathy go out after others; especially the young of the flock, for the Lord's glory. How beautiful to the eye of Jesus now, and how refreshing to his heart, to see those for whom He died walking happily and steadfastly in the footsteps of the flock, and feeding beside the shepherds' tents. There the tender budding grass is found, and the quiet waters flow. But oh! how grieving both to the chief, and to the under shepherds to witness, it may be, a dear young disciple, who seemed for awhile to be all heart for the

Lord, yielding to the arguments of unconverted friends and to the attractions of the world, and, by and by, making excuses for a measure of conformity to the *fashion* of the world. Must I give up this—and must I give up that? such will sometimes say. Rather think, my brother, my sister, on what you gave up, in order to enjoy these things. Most solemn thought! *For these follies and vanities you gave up Christ.* I mean as to your experimental enjoyment of Him. You know that you cannot enjoy the Lord and these things at the same time. And now, *you must give up these for Christ.* But do you hesitate for a moment? Look to the cross! "Oh how he loves"—O how He dies, and dies for thee—and for these very sins! Oh! cast thyself at His blessed feet in true godly sorrow. Thou hast offended His eye, thou hast grieved His heart, thou hast dishonoured His name; confess all to Him; and thy restoration shall be perfect, and all thy past sins shall be forgiven and forgotten for ever.

But until this is done, spirituality of mind, earnestness of heart, and communion with the Lord are interrupted. It is a solemn case of backsliding. And unless the Lord clog the wheels of the chariot, who can tell how fast and how far it may run down the hill. Sometimes an accident will happen and stop it suddenly, but with much damage, the scars of which may remain for ever. O Lord, let Thy grace shine forth; and allure many into the wilderness who keep too near the world's borders, and too often cast a wishful glance over the line of separation. Wean them from this present evil world. Let them be arrayed in the meek and lowly beauties of the lily, for thee alone. Suffer them not to appear

adorned for the eye of the world. Surely, most blessed Lord, to hear thee saying, "As the lily among thorns so is my love among the daughters," would infinitely more than recompense for all our self-denial.

We are told by those who have travelled in the East, that the apple-tree of this country is not what is here meant; but, most likely, the rich citron-tree of Palestine. The thick, dark green foliage of the citron boughs affords a most convenient shelter from the rays of the sun, and its delicious fruit is most fragrant and refreshing. Compared with the common trees of the wood, it must be an object of great beauty and interest to the eye of the weary traveller. So the spouse compares her Beloved with all others. "As the apple-tree among the trees of the wood, so is my Beloved among the sons." There is none like Christ. He is the "chiefest among ten thousand." She is in the full enjoyment of Himself. Not of His gifts merely, blessed as these are, but of Himself.

There is now, observe, full personal communion. She is in the cloudless light of His favour. The response is perfect: "As the lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters." "As the apple-tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons." What has grace wrought! See where it leads to! Could the Jew ever have reached the bosom of God by climbing the rugged cliffs of Sinai! Ah, no! It must be all grace from first to last. Here we see perfect reconciliation and communion. The Lord rests in His love; as it is written, "He will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing." (Zeph. iii. 17.) The Bride, too, is now enjoying perfect repose in that unchanging love. "I *sat down* under his shadow with

great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste." Here her soul finds rest, joy, and abundance. The heart is feeding on Christ. Every need is met. She is in her own happy place now. She once had another place; the place, alas, of sin and death. But the Lord has delivered her out of it, and brought her into His own—His new place as the risen Messiah. And this is now her place: she cannot be in both. "*I raised thee up under the apple-tree.*" The apple-tree is Christ.

Israel, we know, shall ere long be *raised up* from their present condition of national death, to enjoy the blessings of the new covenant *under Christ*. But they can only be raised up *by Christ*, and come into blessing *under Christ*. Mercy is their only ground, helpless necessity their only plea, and Christ their only way. When it comes to this, all is well, for ever well, both with Jew and Gentile. Israel shall yet be gathered on this ground, and under this blessed Head. Then shall they sit under His shadow in the fullest sense, and find His fruit sweet to their taste—the glorious fruits of His wondrous love in dying for the rebellious nation. "And so all Israel shall be saved; as it is written, there shall come out of Zion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob." (Rom. xi. 26.) "In that day, saith the Lord of hosts, shall ye call every man his neighbour under his vine and under his fig-tree." Zech. iii. 10.

"Hail, blessed scene of endless joy!
Where Jesus shall for ever reign;
Where nothing hurtful shall annoy,
But gladness fill the happy plain.
Free from all sin, and free from fear,
None shall e'er sigh or shed a tear."

Ver. 4. "*He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love.*" In meditating on the different scenes of delight, into which the happy Bride is introduced by the King, let thy thoughts, O my soul, dwell for a little, on the *source* of these many streams of happiness. It is the believer's privilege to drink at the fountain as well as at the stream. God Himself is the source of all our blessing. The pleasures which are at His right hand can never be numbered. But the deep, deep fountain of the soul's perfect blessedness, is the happy assurance, *that nothing was needed to turn the heart of God to us.* Oh, precious truth! His love is like the ring that was put on the hand of the prodigal, it has neither beginning nor end. "God is love." He changeth not. Therefore, all the rich blessings of His love are secured to us for ever, by what He is in Himself. Not by what *we are*, but by what *He is*. "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." 1 John iv. 10.

This is the perfect rest of faith—the heart of God—the native fountain of all true happiness. How can I doubt the love that gave an only-begotten Son? What an answer to every question—He gave His Son for me a sinner. "God commendeth his love towards us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." (Rom. v. 8.) What is unbelief? Not believing how good God is in giving His Son to die for us. What is faith? Believing in the perfect love of God, and the gift of His dear Son. "Verily, verily I say unto you, he that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into

condemnation; but is passed from death unto life." John v. 24.

The work of Christ was not needed to turn the heart of God to the sinner, but to turn the heart of the sinner to God. All Scripture reveals this blessed truth. It was revealed in the Garden of Eden when man fell. This was the first occasion to bring it out. The guilty pair sought a hiding-place from the presence of the Lord, behind the trees of the garden. But the voice of Him who came to seek and to save the lost, falls in gracious accents on their ear; "Adam, where art thou?" Man is now a lost sinner, and God is seeking him. The first words of redeeming love characterize the whole work of redemption. And the revelation of God's love in the prediction, that the seed of the woman should bruise the head of the serpent, gained their confidence, we doubt not, and drew them from their hiding-place into the presence of God. Ever since then, and now, at this present time, when the sinner, through grace, believes in the perfect love of God, in the gift and work of His Son, he is brought to God in faith, and in the full credit of the death, resurrection, and glory of the Lord Jesus. Thus he is pardoned, and accepted in the Beloved, and the desires of the heart of God towards him are fully answered.

But though the love of God towards us has ever been the same, there were many hindrances in us to its full and free outflow. God is righteous as well as love. He is holy as well as merciful. He is ever consistent with Himself. But what *love* desired, *wisdom* planned, and *power* accomplished. The removal of the hindrances proves the greatness of the love. Jesus came to do the

will of God. He finished the work. He put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. Love, divine, eternal love, could not do more than this. He *abolished* sin by the sacrifice of Himself. To what end, O my soul, was this great, mysterious sacrifice! The apostle answers—"That he might bring us to God." Not merely into heaven, but back to God Himself. To the knowledge of Himself, and to perfect reconciliation with Him. "For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, *that he might bring us to God.*" (1 Peter iii. 18.) And again, it is written, "For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." (2 Cor. v. 21.) And now, mark, we have both the *love* and the *righteousness* in Christ. Both are ours in Him. He is also our *life* as the risen Jesus; but carefully observe, that it is a life beyond the grave, a life which has the stamp of victory over death and the grave. We have everything in Christ *now* which fits us for the immediate presence of God, where there is fulness of joy, and where there are pleasures for evermore.

In companionship with Jesus, the spouse is here enjoying the same scenes as Himself. They are, as it were, visiting the many springs of divine happiness. He is leading her to the "fountains of living waters." In the morning of the day, she says, "The King hath brought me into his chambers." A little while after, and the scene is changed. She appears to be with Him in the fields, where He feeds and rests His flock at noon. Further on in the day, she says, "Our bed is green. The beams of our house are cedar, and our rafters of fir." Here, the figure appears to be that of persons reclining

on the tender grass, beneath the refreshing shade of the interlacing boughs of the fir and cedar trees. After this, she sat down under the shadow of the apple-tree, and found the fruit thereof sweet to her taste. And now, at the close of the day, we may say, she is brought by her Beloved to the banquet of wine, under the banner of His love. The unfolded, manifested love of the Bridegroom is the secret of all her joy, the native spring of all her delights.

Long, long has the banner of His love been laying, as it were, folded up. Faith always knew that in God's account, it was only laid aside for a little while; surely wrapped up in the word of promise, though not displayed. Still, many good men have both said and written, that the banner of Jehovah's favour would never again float over His ancient Zion. The truth of God as to the rebuilding of the city and temple, and the restoration of Israel, has been overlooked by many, and spiritualized by others. But what saith the Scripture?

Ever since "the Nobleman" spoken of in the parable, "went into a far country, to receive for himself a kingdom, and *to return*," no banner of divine love has waved over Jerusalem. For more than eighteen hundred years the beloved city, and the beautiful temple, have been laid in ruins, and the people dispersed to the four winds of heaven. This, the Lord Himself repeatedly predicted. "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not. Behold your house is left unto you desolate. For

I say unto you, ye shall not see me henceforth, *till* ye shall say, *Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.*" Matt. xxiii. 27—29.

He has delayed His return, we know, in rich grace to us. His love has been active, though not in Israel. His long suffering is salvation. From Jew and Gentile He has been calling out, through the power of the Holy Ghost by the preaching of the gospel, a people for His name. (Acts xv. 14—18.) Since the day of Pentecost, He has been making "of twain one new man." This is what God is now occupied with, and what we should be occupied with, namely, *the new man;* not *the old man.* Hence we are exhorted to "put off the old man," and to "put on the new man." (Eph. iv.) But ere long, the Church, which is His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all, shall be complete, and caught up to meet the Lord in the air,—and so shall we ever be with the Lord. (Eph. i. 22, 23; 1 Thess. iv.) This will be accomplished before Israel can be owned again as the people of Jehovah. But though the Jews have been long set aside and chastised for their sins, the Apostle assures us that they are not cast off for ever, and that "the gifts and calling of God are without repentance." Rom. xi.

The time to favour Zion shall come, the time which God hath set. He shall appear in His glory, when he builds up Zion. For the name of the Lord shall be declared in Zion, and His praise in Jerusalem. (Ps. cii.) The word of the Lord shall stand fast for ever: the mere theories of men shall come to nought. "For, lo, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will bring again the captivity of my people Israel and Judah, saith the

Lord; and I will cause them to return to the land that I gave to their fathers, and they shall possess it." (Jer. xxx. 3.) And, again, "Yea, I will rejoice over them to do them good, and I will plant them in this land assuredly with my whole heart, and with my whole soul." (xxxii. 41.) Then, surely, shall the banner of God's unchanging love wave over them. Oh! what must be the blessing of that people whom God shall assuredly bless with His *whole heart and His whole soul!* What grace and condescension in God thus to speak! Oh, what blessing awaits the now outcast, and down-trodden Jew! Few will believe it, but the day is coming, and near at hand, when Messiah their King shall stand up for them against every foe,—when He shall be a wall of fire around His beloved Jerusalem, and the glory in the midst of her. Then shall the long-folded-up banner of His love be unfurled, to be furled no more for ever. Then shall all the families of the earth see the Lord's faithful love, when they come up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles. (Zech. xiv.) And then, O then, shall this precious word be fulfilled: "*He brought me into the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love. Stay me with flagons, comfort me with apples; for I am sick of love.*"

And now, O my soul, what do these changing scenes of deep, and deeper blessedness—these varying fountains of fresh delight, suggest for thy meditation? What voice have they for thee *now*? Figures and allegories though they be, they were written aforetime for thy learning. Plainly, they represent the realities of fellowship with Christ—the affections of Bridegroom

and Bride—the sympathies of hearts that are *one*. Hast thou not sometimes observed, that after actual separation from the world for a while, as a hidden one, and close communion with the Lord enjoyed, the tone and character of our minds become more spiritual? The Lord's presence is more fully realized; the body becomes less a clog, the spirit more free. Then we feel further from earth and nearer to heaven, in the conscious enjoyment of heavenly things, in the assurance of the Lord's love, and His delight in us.

But this state of high spiritual enjoyment is only occasional; nor is it reached, generally speaking, in a moment. We cannot turn, all at once, from the enjoyment of earthly things, to *this measure* of enjoyment of heavenly things. True we have Christ, and the Spirit, and the word, and the Father's love, always the same; but our communion in these things is not always the same. Even the necessary occupation of mind and body with temporal things, blunts our spiritual sensibilities for the time. Secret prayer, meditation on the word, self-judgment, the body kept under, the heart delighting in the things of God, and the Spirit revealing to our souls the love of Jesus, will, in most cases, be found associated with this condition of spiritual enjoyment. Indeed, we believe, these exercises must be the *habit* of the believer, if he would be heavenly-minded. We must walk by *faith*, as belonging to the new creation, not by *sight* as of the old. (2 Cor. v. 16, 17, 18.) At the same time it is well to remember, that the blessed Lord is not bound to any one class of means, in bringing His loved ones into His house of wine—the place of His presence where there is fulness of joy. We

have seen a soul in ecstasies of joy, through being suddenly brought to a sense of its own failure, and of the Lord's unfailing love. But here, in the case of the Bride before us, there has been no apparent failure as yet, there is marked progress in her experience. Like a soul coming from the closet to family worship, and from thence to the public banquet of the Saviour's dying love. The tone of her communion deepens, as she passes from scene to scene. Her joy increases, until the revelation of the Bridegroom's love and goodness become so overpowering to her soul, that the body faints under it. Yet she seeks to be sustained by that which has exhausted her. "*Stay me with flagons, comfort me with apples; for I am sick of love.*"

"The love, the love that I bespeak,
Works wonders in the soul;
For when I'm whole it makes me sick,
When sick it makes me whole.

I'm overcome, I faint, I fail,
Till love shall love relieve;
More love divine the wound can heal,
Which love divine did give."

Feeding on Christ never satiates the soul. While it satisfies to the full, it whets the appetite. And the Lord's delight is to give more abundantly. "Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it." He alone can satisfy the desires of the heart and of the mind. But mark, He draws her yet nearer to Himself. "*His left hand is under my head, and his right hand doth embrace me.*" Blessed Lord Jesus—Saviour God—Heavenly Bridegroom—Head of thy body, the Church! Where shall

we find the heights and depths, the lengths and breadths of thy love? More intimate—more real—more blessed communion can never be enjoyed. She leans her head on the bosom of her Beloved, the place of perfect and eternal repose. There can be nothing higher than this—lower there ought not to be. Oh, for more experience of the *exhausting* and *sustaining* power of the Lord's gracious presence! Oh, for a larger heart—a more capacious soul!

Ver. 7. "*I charge you, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, by the roes, and by the hinds of the field, that ye stir not up, nor awake my love, till he please.*" At the close of this happy and cloudless day, we leave the Bride of the King, in the repose which His changeless love alone can give. The banner of His love over her, the everlasting arms underneath her, she rests in His eternal embrace. She delights in what He is. Hence she speaks of *His* shadow, *His* fruit, *His* banquet, *His* banner, *His* left hand, *His* right hand. It is all, it is only, Christ. When the soul is thus occupied with Him, He of all others is the most careful that it should not be disturbed. The roes and the hinds are the most easily startled creatures in the field. And their sense of hearing is so acute, that a far distant sound of danger will alarm them. So keenly sensitive should we all be to the most distant approach of that which would interfere with our walk and communion with the Lord; or that would in any way turn us aside from the paths of practical holiness, and entire devotedness to the Lord Jesus Christ.

" The startled roe, the timid, trembling hind,
See how they stand in watchfulness intense,
Noting the changeful breeze, lest on its wing
Some tones of distant peril should be borne!
I charge you, daughters of Jerusalem,
I charge you by the roes and by the hinds,
Ye sons and daughters of Almighty God,
Be watchful too;—be jealous over prayer,
With sensitive alarm observe and shun
Whate'er disturbs or threatens to disturb
Communion with your God!—the roving thought,
The self-exalting fancy, and the doubt
Mistrustively unjust; come they not oft
Struggling to quench the flame of holy love
Enkindled in the soul, and intercept
Glory's bright dawning from the eager eye?"

Ver. 8. "*The voice of my beloved, behold He cometh leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills.*" When the soul has been maintained, for a length of time, in uninterrupted communion with the Lord, the affections become more lively, and the desire for His return becomes more real and earnest. Hast thou caught, O my soul, the spirit of the loving and loved Shelomith, in these blessed words? "The voice of my beloved, behold, he cometh." Is He indeed thy best beloved? Is there no voice to thee like His? Art thou waiting and longing for Him daily?

There is a great difference between a person believing in what is called "the doctrine of the second advent," and a loving soul in the joy of communion, earnestly looking and longing for the Lord Himself to come. How little influence the belief of the doctrine has on the heart and life, compared with having the person of Christ, as the all influential object for the heart, and

being like the Thessalonians, "waiting for the Son from heaven;" or like the Bride waiting for the Bridegroom. "The Spirit and the Bride say come." It is the *heart* of the Bride that says Come, though moved and stirred by the Spirit who dwells there. He gives us the happy consciousness of the relationship, and the affections that belong to it.

We are swift to hear, and quick to recognize, the *sound* of the voice we love. The well-known voice, and the familiar name "Mary," thrilled her whole soul. And even when the person speaking is too far off for us to hear the words, the sound is enough to touch the chord that vibrates the whole heart, and awakens all its drowsy energies. "The *voice* of my beloved," she exclaims, "behold he cometh." Her whole soul is filled with expectation. Now He is near. "The Lord is at hand." Lo, He comes! He comes! "Leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills. My beloved is like a roe or a young hart." His feet are swift as hinds' feet.

In place of nearness to the Lord in *spirit* fully satisfying the heart, it really increases its desires for the fuller joy which His personal presence gives. What could be more near, more dear, more intimate, than the communion which we have seen the Bride enjoying, by faith, since the commencement of our meditations? There has been no interruption to her joy, but decided progress in the apprehension of His love, and the enjoyment of His favour. Some have thought, that in the passage before us, there are signs of the heart going back and getting out of communion—during the season of her repose; that the abundance of her privileges

led to a measure of carelessness; and that her great spiritual enjoyment was succeeded by a measure of declension. Such a thing, we doubt not, has often occurred, but we see no signs of it here.

Is it when we are in communion or out of communion that we desire the coming of the Lord? Easily canst thou answer this question, O my soul. There can be no real desire for the Lord to come when we are not happy with Him. True, we are always safe *in* Him, but, alas, we are not always happy *with* Him. If we have gone a step too far with the world, or neglected self-judgment, we lose our happiness *with* Him, and at such times, we would rather that He did not come. "Peter saith unto him, Thou shalt never wash my feet. Jesus answered him, If I wash thee not, thou hast no part *with* me." (John xiii. 8.) He does not say, observe, thou hast no part *in* me. That He could never say. But He teaches Peter, and us, that if self-judgment is neglected—if the daily defilements are not cleansed away "with the washing of water by the word," fellowship *with* Him is interrupted. He cannot go on with unjudged—unconfessed evil. "Thou hast no part *with* me," are words of deepest solemnity. What wouldst thou not rather part with, O my soul, than part company with thy Lord, even for a day, or an hour? Where would be thy power for walk, worship, and service? What weakness, what darkness, would beset thy path! Shame may cover thy face, and sorrow fill thy heart, as thou placest thy soiled feet in His hands, for surely He will see where thou hast been. But remember this, they never can be washed, until *He* do it. "If *I* wash thee not thou hast no part *with* me."

If thou wouldst walk with Jesus, and be happy with Him, thou must walk in separation—in *true* separation from *all* evil—from all that is contrary to His holiness, and unbearable to His nature. Lead me, O Lord, in *thy* way, in this evil day, that so I may ever most earnestly pray for, and lovingly desire, thy coming!

"My Lord delayeth his coming," is the language of a heart that is seeking present gratification in this world. "Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly," is the language of a heart that is filled with love to Jesus, and earnestly breathing after personal nearness to Himself. In the proportion that we enjoy Christ *spiritually*, we will long to see Him face to face. In the New Jerusalem, "They shall see his face." Who would not long for this, that has seen Him even through a glass darkly? This is always a test of the soul's condition. When the house is in confusion, the wife is not waiting and longing for her husband's return. No, she is occupied in getting things put in order, and when everything is straight and such as *he* likes, she begins to think of his coming, and longs to hear his voice and see his face.

Is it not enough, some Christians say, that I know I am His? Why should I be every day looking for His coming from heaven? I know my sins are pardoned, and that I am saved. Besides, I can trust and love the unseen Saviour. So far well, my fellow Christian; but is this the voice of an earnest, loving heart, or of one that is cold and indifferent as to His blessed Person? Canst thou think of all His love and grace, of all His sufferings, and death for thee, and of His exaltation and glory, and not long to see Himself? Art thou not

longing for a glimpse of that face, which shall ravish thy heart for ever, and fill thee with loftiest praise? What would the absent husband think, how would he feel, were his wife thus to speak: "I know I am his. That is enough for me, I am satisfied. Besides, I am hearing from him daily, and receiving the assurance of his love, but I never think about his return. I have never once said—Make haste home. I never long to see his face." Ah! my friend, my friend, how would you interpret such a condition of things? Would you call this love for the absent one? Would it satisfy your own heart—especially if your love has not cooled down? As the love of Christ never cools down, He feels at once the least falling away in us. Nothing but love will ever satisfy love. "We love him, because he first loved us." Christian love is the reflection of Christ's. The more frequently the loving wife hears from her absent husband, the more is her desire quickened for his return. And the communications of his love by letter, only make her long the more to see himself. The home circle may be perfectly comfortable, but to her heart it wants the presence of one to make it completely happy. And while he is not there, nothing on earth can fill the blank. Alas, how little we feel the blank which the Person of Christ alone can fill!

It is the Lord *Himself*, as Messiah the King, that the loving spouse so longs after here. "The voice of my beloved, behold, he cometh." He has revealed Himself to her heart. She now enters, by faith, into His love and joy as the Bridegroom, the King in Zion. Now she knows and values His love, and longs to

possess Himself as her own Messiah. Blessed change! The place where He was once despised and rejected, by the daughter of Zion, and over which He shed tears, shall ere long be the scene of His Bridegroom-love, and His bright millennial glory. The desire of the God-fearing remnant in the latter day for the appearing of the Messiah as their King and Deliverer, is spoken of in the Psalms and the prophets, as of the most fervent and intense character: "Oh that thou wouldest rend the heavens, that thou wouldest come down, that the mountains might flow down at thy presence. As when the melting fire burneth, the fire causeth the waters to boil, to make thy name known to thine adversaries that the nations may tremble at thy presence." Isaiah lxiv. 1, 2.

Under the figure of a Bride, we have the same intense desires in the song, though different in character. In the passage before us, it is not so much their own deliverance, and the overthrow of their enemies, or even His own kingdom and glory, as the heart's desire for the Person of their coming Messiah. It is "*My* beloved . . . . *He* cometh. *He* comes quickly. Like a roe or a young hart." Already *He* is, as it were, at the *wall* of our house, looking through the windows, and shewing *Himself* through the lattice-work of our garden. The remnant in Jerusalem have, here, intimations of the near approach of the King—their own full deliverance and millennial glory. He greatly cheers their heart by still plainer revelations of Himself, and by assuring them of His love, and of the joy of His heart in them. Nothing could be more beautiful and touching than the words of the Lord in the following

verses. He addresses herself, and she loves to repeat His words. "My beloved spake, and said unto me, *Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away. For, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone; the flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land. The fig tree putteth forth her green figs, and the vines with the tender grapes give a good smell. Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away.*" (Ver. 10—13.) A little while ago, and she could only discern the sound of His voice, and catch through the lattice-work a glimpse of His eye. But now, O happy Bride, He is near enough for her to hear the words of His mouth. To faith, blessed be His name, he is ever near, ever present. "His left hand is under my head, and his right hand doth embrace me." This is faith. It can lean upon His bosom. It can repose in His embrace at night, and go out with Him in the morning to the vineyards, to see how the vines flourish. This is most blessed. Still, *personally*, He is not here. He is in heaven, we are on the earth. Knowest thou well, my soul, these distinctions? And say, is it not while reposing by faith in Him, that thy heart most earnestly longs for His coming, to take thee up to be with Himself in glory? Oh! to be free in heart from this world, and ever ready, like the bird on the bough of the tree, with well fledged wings to fly away. Earth's fairest scene is not heaven, its happiest spot is not the paradise of God.

Now, the day of gladness begins to dawn for long oppressed Israel. The morning breaks! "The Lord Himself will soon appear." "The kingdom of heaven is at hand." The long, dark, and dreary winter of the

Lord's absence is past. The spring time has come, the summer draweth nigh. The bright and cloudless morning begins to dawn. Since the day that man sinned and fell, this groaning earth has never witnessed such a scene of vernal beauty as these verses describe. Nevertheless, they fitly represent the future glory and blessing of the land of Israel, and of the whole earth.

"See the day
As if already present, when the storm
Of wintry tribulation shall have passed,
And clouds have ceased to pour their torrents down,
And floods restrained their overwhelming rage:
See earth made beautiful . . . . Lo! Judah's sapless bough,
And severed Ephraim, are grafting in—
Wondrous precursors of the summer nigh."

Many have thought and said, that Israel's winter would be perpetual; that no spring or summer would ever return for the cast-off nation. But such thoughts were never learnt from the book of God. There we read in the plainest terms, that in due time "He shall cause them that come of Jacob to take root. Israel shall blossom and bud, and fill the face of the world with fruit." The cheering beams of "the Sun of Righteousness" shall chase away for ever the gloom and barrenness of their long winter. The budding flowers, the ripening figs, the blooming vines, the singing of birds, the voice of the turtle, are sure emblems, not only that winter is past, but that spring has come. And though nothing in the vineyard of the Bride be yet ripe, there is, in the unfolding bud of promise, the sure pledge of a glorious summer and an abundant autumn.

Ver. 14. "*O my dove, that art in the clefts of the rock, in the secret places of the stairs, let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice; for sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely.*" In thy meditations, O my soul, on the signs of the coming glory, see that thou distinguish according to Scripture, between that which is earthly and that which is heavenly—between the *earthly calling* of Israel, and the *heavenly calling* of the Church. The blessed Lord, as Jehovah, in the latter day will espouse the cause of His earthly people, and Jerusalem will become the centre of earthly glory and blessing in her character as Bride of the King. The Church is the Bride of the Lamb—the once lowly, suffering, atoning Lamb, but now exalted, heavenly Christ. Both, of course, are figurative. But figurative of what? The term Bride is the symbol of affection, endearment, and *oneness* as to position. The Bride ranks with the Bridegroom. The Jewish Bride will rank with Him in earthly glory. The Church, the heavenly Bride, will rank with Him in heavenly glory. Having owned and trusted Him during His humiliation and rejection, she will be nearest and dearest to Him, in His exaltation and glory. The term also represents myriads of saved souls. An individual believer *now* could not speak of Christ as *his* Bridegroom, but as *his* Saviour. I can say, He is *my* Saviour, and that "He loved *me* and gave himself for *me*." He is the Saviour of the sinner, the Bridegroom of the Church.

The glory of the coming kingdom will be twofold—celestial and terrestrial. "That in the dispensation of the fulness of times, he might gather together in one, all things in Christ, both which are in *heaven*, and

which are on *earth;* even in him." (Eph. i. 8, 9, 10.) The full power, blessing, and glory of both spheres, will be headed up in Christ.

Here, mark, for a moment, the difference between Israel's place and blessing in connection with the coming kingdom, and that of the Church, as spoken of in Scripture. The Lord comes down to where Israel is, and blesses them there. "The Redeemer shall come to Zion." (Luke i. 68—80.) The Church is caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. (1 Thess. iv.) They (the Jews) will be blessed with all temporal blessings in a pleasant land. (Amos ix. 11—15.) We with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places. (Eph. i.) Jerusalem on earth will be the centre of earthly glory and blessing—the royal city—the metropolis of the whole earth; and through it all the nations of the earth shall be blessed. For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. (Isa. ii.) The Jerusalem above will be the centre of heavenly glory. The glory of God will lighten it, and the Lamb will be the light thereof. (Rev. xxi.) The heavenly saints will be in their bodies of glory; fashioned like unto Christ's body of glory. (Phil. iii. 21.) The whole house of Israel will then be blessed with the long promised blessing of "the new heart" and "the right spirit." (Ezek. xxxvi. 24—28.) And they shall fall away no more for ever.

Israel of old is spoken of as being married to Jehovah. "For thy Maker is thine husband, the Lord of Hosts is his name." (Isaiah liv. 5.) But because of their unfaithfulness, and especially for their rejection of Christ, they were cast off for a season. Since then, Israel has

been on the common level of all sinners. In the preaching of the gospel, both Jews and Gentiles are alike addressed as lost sinners; and all who are gathered out by the grace of God from both parties, are formed into "one body." Both are blessed with the same privileges in Christ, and the "one body" is blessed with the same privileges *as* Christ in heavenly places. The Gentiles who were dispensationally far off, and the Jews who were nigh, have now, on the principle of faith, equal blessings in Christ. He hath made *both* one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition, for to make in Himself of *twain one new man*, so making peace. For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father. See Ephesians ii. 13—22.

The true hope of the Church—the "one body"—indwelt by the "one Spirit," is *the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ from heaven*, to receive us unto Himself. "I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, *I will come again, and receive you unto myself: that where I am, there ye may be also.*" When this has been accomplished, Israel will again appear on the scene. Then the Spirit of God will begin to work in the remnant of Judah. After the Church is caught away, and during the open reign of Antichrist, before the Lord appears in glory—just between the rapture of the saints and the glorious appearing, this remnant will be the object of the Lord's especial care and love. Speaking of them under the figure of a spouse, He says, "I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her. And I will give her her vineyards from thence, and the valley of Achor for a door of hope; and she shall sing there

as in the days of her youth, and as in the day when she came up out of Egypt. And it shall be at that day, saith the Lord, that thou shalt call me *Ishi*, that is, *my husband*, and shalt call me no more Baali, that is, my lord. *And I will betroth thee unto me for ever.*" Now, their espousals shall be everlasting, the union shall endure for ever, and great will be the Lord's delight in His faithful, loving, admiring, adoring, worshipping spouse. See Hosea i., ii., iii.

What then, are we to understand by the passage before us? "*O my dove, that art in the clefts of the rock, in the secret places of the stairs, let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice; for sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely.*" From the tenth verse to the close of the fifteenth, we have an unbroken address of tenderest love, sweetest encouragement, and brightest hope. What more blessed words could even the lips of divine love utter? His object is to draw out her heart in love and confidence towards Himself. It is quite evident that the full blaze of millennial glory will not burst suddenly on the land of Israel and the nations, but by degrees, like the passing away of winter, and the gradual approach of spring and summer. Hence the need of faith on the part of the spouse. But He cheers her heart with the assurance that the day of her deliverance draweth nigh. He would have her to know that His eye is upon her, and to wait patiently. On the other hand, we learn from many portions of Scripture, that she will, at this moment, be the special object of the malice of Antichrist. He will seek to devour the faithful remnant. (Rev. xii. 6, 17.) But guided by the Spirit of God, she finds a refuge in the wilderness.

"Then let them which be in Judea flee into the mountains." The Beloved knows her hiding-place. To His eye and to His heart, she is like *the dove in the rock*—in the secret place of the stairs, or the rugged side of a precipice, which has the appearance of a stair.

But her voice is sweet to her Beloved, and He loves to hear it, though it still resembles the mournful note of the dove, that sits solitary, mourning for its mate. Her countenance is comely: she is beautiful to Him, however marred by persecution, suffering, and trial. And He seeks to see her—to hear her—oh, deepest, tenderest, kindest love! Was ever love like this? There is no love like His. "Let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice, for sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely." Oh! what gracious, unselfish love! What a revelation, what an unfolding of His heart! Truly may it be said of His heart, but of His heart only, "*Love* is strong as death; jealousy is cruel as the grave." Does death take a strong hold of its victim? Oh, how strong!—what a hold!—such is the strength—the hold of the Saviour's love. Let thy meditations be deep, and patient, O my soul, on the love of Christ—the love of Christ to His spouse—the love of Christ to thee. Think of the grasp—the hold which death takes—think of the almighty grasp, the eternal hold of the Saviour's love. The similitude is appalling—overwhelming—the reality, consoling, comforting, refreshing, and strengthening, beyond all measure. Oh! the deep, vast, profound, immeasurable, untraceable, glories of the Saviour's love!

Still further, gather up all thy strength—concentrate all thy thoughts—meditate on that other aspect of the

Saviour's love: "Jealousy is cruel as the grave." What meaneth this? These seem hard words to set forth my Lord's most tender love. Only strong similitudes give an idea of the *power* of His love. These give its twofold aspect. If death *takes* a strong hold of a person, the grave *keeps* it. It is unyielding. It is a cruel grave. It hears not the cry of the bereaved. The widow's groans, and sighs, and tears—the orphan's deep and bitter wail, are alike unheeded. It holds fast its prey. It yields not to the deep tones of the broken in heart, the wounded in soul, and the crushed in spirit. If thou shouldst supplicate the grave on bended knee, ever so earnestly, it will never yield to thee the loved one who has been wrenched from thy heart's core, and entombed in its deep caverns. How often it has been besieged, and besought with bitterest tears, deepest groans, loudest cries, but all in vain. It hears not, it heeds not, it yields not. What *takes* such hold as death? What *keeps* it like the grave?

Learn then, O my soul, from these dark, but strong similitudes, the character of the Saviour's love. Sheltered in the cleft of the rock—in His wounded side—nestling in that mysterious heart of love. His timid, fluttered dove securely rests. No bird of prey can ever molest her there. All the vultures of hell cannot touch a feather of her wing. They can never reach the cleft of the rock wherein she hides. She is far above their highest flight. But may she not lose her hold some day, in an unguarded moment, and after all be seized, and perish by those who are seeking to devour? Did her security depend in the least degree on *her*

holding fast, all would be lost in a moment. But, bless God, all depends on the hold which Jesus has. It is the rock that holds her, not she that holds the rock. What *takes* such a hold as death? What *keeps* it like the grave? Divine love holds its objects with a power stronger than death, though sweetly tender, and is more unyielding than the grave. Will the blessed Lord ever "deliver the soul of his turtle dove unto the multitude of the wicked?" No! never! never! "I give unto my sheep eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father which gave them me is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand." (John x. 28, 29.) "Behold a king shall reign in righteousness, and princes shall rule in judgment. And a man shall be as a hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of waters in a dry place; as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land." Isaiah xxxii. 1, 2.

But all types and figures, allegories, and illustrations utterly fail to set forth the Saviour's love. His *glory* will be revealed, and all flesh shall see it. But His *love* can never be fully revealed. True, we shall see Him as He is—in all the realities of His love, and know even as we are known; and find in His love our eternal delight. But there are heights and depths, lengths and breadths in His love which must remain unknown, unrevealed for ever.

Ver. 15. "*Take us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vines: for our vines have tender grapes.*" Most graciously the well-beloved links himself with his spouse

in the care of the vineyard. Take "us" the foxes .... for "our" vines have tender grapes. They are yet green and tender. They are only beginning to blossom. The vineyard must be guarded. The little foxes have sharp teeth, and though little, they are subtle, and do great damage amongst the vines. During the bleakness and barrenness of winter there is no cover in the vineyards for the fox. The leafless bough offers no inducement. But with the reviving spring they find abundant shelter, and favourable opportunities to commit their ravages. Watch thou, O my soul, the state of thine own heart. Watch especially against the daily cares of this present life, and the thousand things that tend to mar thy fruitfulness. Abide in the true vine, let thy nourishment be drawn from His roots. So shalt thou bear much fruit to the Father's glory. "Be careful for nothing: but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." Phil. iv. 6, 7.

In times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord, and of great awakenings, there is need for redoubled care. It is truly pleasing to witness the springing bud, and the unfolding blossoms—to listen to the songsters amongst the branches; the soft and significant voice of the turtle; but the keeper of the vineyard has more to do than contemplate the beautiful, or listen to the sweet sounds of music. He must watch against the subtle intruder, that lurks amongst the luxuriant foliage of the vines to deceive and to destroy. Around thee now, and back over many years' experience, thy thoughts instinctively

flow. Many a goodly vine hast thou seen marred for a season by the cunning craftiness of him who lieth in wait to deceive. Oh! how heart-breaking such disappointments are.

> "Redouble your precautions, O ye saints!
> Aware of the destroyer!—stop the gaps
> Where, entering silently, he spoils the vines:—
> Be cautious! for your enemy is strong,
> To sleepless malice adds perfected craft,
> *And spiteful certainty of shortening rule;*
> Ye know, if ye are Christ's, your struggling souls
> Resist a baffled and defeated foe.
> 'Take ye those foes,' who contrive the woe
> Of God's Jerusalem! expose their craft,
> Seize your keen weapons, servants of the Lord,
> And sword in hand, yea, in your armour build
> Her walls and fences that are broken down!
> *The weakest is made strong who cleaves to Christ.*"

Like the vine-dresser who has taken every pains to see that his vines are well watered, trained, and pruned, he leaves them in the evening, full of hope that they may be looking still better in the morning. But, lo! to his bitter disappointment, the destroyer has been amongst his vines—many are sadly nipped; one, to outward appearance, is ruined. While the keeper of the vineyard slept, the fox was accomplishing his work of devastation. Its sharp teeth had gnawed the stem to its core. The life-blood was running down. It was also stripped of its bark, the branches were broken, the leaves lay scattered on the ground, and the tender grapes were entirely gone. Alas, alas, it was one of his most flourishing vines. It had a goodly stem, well nourished in a rich soil, beneath the genial beams of a southern sun. Its blossom was beautiful, and it promised an

abundant vintage. But in one night, in an evil hour, it fell a prey to the enemy. While the husbandman looked thus sorrowfully on his dismembered vine, the thought crossed his mind—thank God! the root remains. For even the foxes of hell may not burrow up the roots of any plant of the Father's planting. But such was the damage done to his hopeful vine, that for a long time to come, it would bear but little fruit.

The application is easy. In the secret of the divine presence, O my soul, study the lesson. Has God given thee a love for souls?—a pastor's heart? Oh! seek to win souls to Christ; and to shelter, nourish, and watch over the sheep and lambs of His fold. "Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof . . . . . And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away." 1 Peter I—10.

Ver. 16. "*My beloved is mine and I am his: he feedeth among the lilies.*" The happy spouse now speaks with full assurance, as to the *possession* of her object. She speaks of Him as her own. There is conscious *possession* of the object of her affections. "My beloved is mine." She does not say, "I *hope* He is," but says plainly, without a question, He *is mine*. When affection is real, the desire of the heart is to obtain possession of the object. For this it will persevere. Nothing less will satisfy the heart.

We have seen, in our Meditations, that the Bride was in the full enjoyment of the blessings of His love. We have also listened to her speaking in admiring delight of His many and excellent qualities; still the

heart was seeking after *possession—relationship.* When the *person* is possessed, all his qualities and virtues are possessed. He Himself is mine. Thus will it be in the latter day. Christ will be for the remnant, and the remnant will be for Christ. "Thou shalt abide for me: thou shalt not be for another: so will I also be for thee." (Hosea iii.) But we are all slow of heart to believe. Again and again, He assures her of His admiring love, and of His great delight in her. The outpouring of His affection is wonderful. Even when she speaks of her blackness, His ready reply is, "O thou fairest among women." How could a doubt remain as to the purpose of His heart? Now she sees what is coming, relationship is anticipated, she can say with certainty—*He is mine!* Blessed triumph! Happy victory! "Jesus is mine." Now, she speaks not of the *fruits* of His love, or of His *excellencies*, but of Himself. All are included in the person.

Couldst thou speak thus certainly, O my soul, as to the possession of any earthly object? Assuredly not. One might say, with a measure of truth, "This money is mine—this place is mine—this honour is mine—this happiness is mine." But how soon may all these things pass away from us, or we from them? Only when Christ is the object of the affections can it be truly said, "My beloved is mine." How often it has happened, that when we thought we had sure possession of that on which the heart had been set, it either eluded our grasp, or if, perchance, we got a hold, the long-looked-for object withered in the hand like a flower plucked from its stem, or if it bloomed for a while, our disappointment was the deeper when it perished. How

many, alas, of the children of men, will have at last to take up a lamentation and say, "All I cared for, all I lived for, all I toiled for, all I sighed for, is not mine now, and never will be mine, never can be mine; for a morsel of meat I sold my birthright, and now all hope is perished, and I must go penniless and portionless for ever!"

What a vain thing it is, for any of the sons or daughters of men to speak of "My" anything as to this world! Supposing one could speak of everything that the world holds dear, as my riches, my influence, my power, my wisdom, my fame—what would they, what could they do for the soul, the nobler part of man? But, oh! how different, when Christ—the well-beloved, is the object of desire—of affection! And when faith can say without the least misgiving—"Christ is mine—He is my beloved—and my beloved is mine"—mine now—mine to wash my sins away—mine to clothe me with the righteousness of God—mine to dwell in my heart by His Spirit—mine through life—mine in the swellings of Jordan—mine in heavenly glory! Yes, my soul, and more—much more! Mine to look to—mine to speak to—mine to care for me—mine to sympathize with me—mine to succour me—mine to close my pilgrim path—wind up my long and weary journey and take me up in the skirts of His cloudy chariot to be with Himself for ever. Say, *say*, O my soul, is this—all this, a suited portion for thee? Is it enough for a poor, vile sinner?

Ah, who can weigh
The mines of treasure hidden in those words:
I am my Saviour's, and the Saviour mine?
What overwhelming prospects they reveal

Through ages yet to come! The spouse of Christ
Fears not to use them, glories in their use,
My Lord, my God, my Saviour, my beloved!
But has she not His warrant? Said not Christ,
As Me the Father loved, so loved I you?
And loved He not *unto the end* His own?
And claims He not from them one only gift,—
That only gift their *heart?*

But ere leaving this blessed, precious, glorious subject, record thy wonder and astonishment that any of the sons and daughters of men should overlook, neglect, or despise this portion—this Christ—this well-beloved. "For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily." All else is emptiness and vanity. And now, as the risen Man in glory, the heir of all things, He invites the poor and the needy, the rich and the noble, the young and the old, to come to Him, that they may share with Him His position, His riches, and His glory. "For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon Him. *For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.*" Rom. x. 1—13.

On the other hand, many a dear, precious soul that truly loves the Lord and trusts in Him is afraid to say, "My beloved is mine." They think it would be presumptuous. Surely they forget that He says it first. And can it be presumptuous to affirm that His word is true? It is always more humble to be guided by His word, than by our own thoughts and feelings. But how came such to love Him? Just because He first loved them. "We love him," says John, "because he first loved us." We never anticipate Christ. The soul that really desires Christ and His salvation is in pos-

session of both. It may refuse to believe it, but it is not the less true. He has already visited that soul in the riches of His grace. He creates the *desire* that He may satisfy it. He creates the *love* that He may meet it. He creates the *faith* that He may answer it. Every good thing cometh down from above. Nothing good can spring up in our hearts naturally. Nothing good can be planted there by the world or Satan. Everything that is good must come from above. And all this is wrought in the soul by the Holy Spirit through the gospel. Every good thought or desire comes from the Lord; so that we may truly say, to *desire* Christ is to have Him—to desire His salvation is to have it. Every soul that really desires to know Christ—to trust Him—love Him—serve Him—praise Him, shall surely know and enjoy Him—love, serve, and praise Him for ever. Man may awaken expectations that he can never satisfy; he may induce love, and bitterly disappoint it: but not so the blessed Lord. He is the true God—His love is perfect. It has been fully manifested.

Be assured then, dear fellow-believer, that He is ours—ours by the free gift of God; ours by the gift of Himself, so that we can say in all humility—"Jesus is mine"—"My beloved is mine." May our souls be enabled to take a more comprehensive grasp of all that He *is*, and of all that He *has* for us!

"*And I am his.*" Well she knows that she is His. He has often assured her heart of this precious truth. The Bride is in the habit of saying what she thinks of her Beloved to others; but He addresses herself directly. "O my love, my dove, my fair one." The dignity and glory of the Head are seen in Him. Is it

not a truly blessed thought, O my soul, that the Christian belongs to no one but Christ—and is subject to nothing but Him? "Therefore let no man glory in men," says the apostle, "for all things are yours. Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come: all are yours. And ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's." (1 Cor. iii. 21—23.) Precious truth! It is plainly stated. The word can never change. "Ye are *Christ's*." The individual soul can say, "I am his." Thus we honour God's word. We belong exclusively to Him. We are subject only to Him.

Moreover, it is also said, "All things are yours." While we belong to no one but Christ, all things belong to us. "Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas," &c., &c. They are all in the place of *servants* to us, no longer as *masters*. Even death itself has lost the mastery. It is now to the believer, not a master, but a messenger of peace—his servant. It can no longer look on me as its prey; the world can no longer say I am its own; the enemy cannot say, I am his. That precious word settles all, "ye are Christ's," and no one's else. Oh! believe it—so believe it, as to follow Him alone. We are bought with a price. We are His by right of purchase—the price, His precious blood. But is it not enough, O my soul, to know that thou art His—His now, henceforth, and for ever—His in time, and His through all eternity? Blessed Lord! it is enough. It is relief and rest to the heart, energy and power to the life, to know that thou art mine, that I am thine, and that I never can pertain to another. O my soul, meditate on these realities—ponder them closely.

Though thou must now dismiss them for a season, return to them again. There is a living freshness to the soul in kindred love, in eternal relationship.

"*He feedeth among the lilies.*" She remembers the name He gave her, "The Lily." This is happy—anything but presumptuous! Oh! that we might think more on the words which He uses, on the titles which He gives. As "The Lily," she is the representative of all His people. In the largeness of her soul, she calls them all "lilies." Besides, she knows that "He feedeth among the lilies." He is to be found there. He finds His refreshment, satisfaction, and delight, in the garden of lilies. Oh! to be used in gathering lilies into His garden, that He may find fresh delight, while yet He delays His coming.

Ver. 17. "*Until the day break, and the shadows flee away, turn, my beloved: and be thou like a roe, or a young hart, upon the mountains of Bether,*" (or division, margin.) The full assurance of His love, and the happy enjoyment of Himself by faith, greatly increases her desire for the day of His glory. Then, "all shadows flee away." All types and shadows being fulfilled in Him, they pass away when He appears. Now, we see through a glass darkly; then, face to face. We shall see the same Jesus *then* as we see *now*, but the dim glass shall be removed. "We shall see him as he is." For Israel, the rising beams of the Sun of Righteousness shall chase away for ever all the darkness of night, and all the gloom of their long and dreary winter. The flowers appear, the birds begin to sing, creation is filled with joy.

The exercise of *faith* and *hope* in these two verses is beautiful and instructive. In reply to His description of the millennial day of glory, and of the place she has in His heart, (ver. 10—15,) she thus expresses her faith, "My beloved is mine and I am his." And her hope "*until* the day break, and the shadows flee away." There is no question on her mind as to the day of glory being near. She only waits for its dawn, and she further knows, that before the brightness of that morning, every shadow must flee away. "And he shall be as the light of the morning, when the sun riseth, even a morning *without clouds;* as the tender grass springing out of the earth by clear shining after rain." 2 Sam. xxiii. 4.

But, "*until*" the dawn of that happy day, she prays her beloved to *abide with her.* She earnestly desires that she may have His gracious presence, and the comfort and sustainment of His love, "*until*" He appear Himself in glory. She clings to the person of her Beloved. Happy fruit of a well-grounded faith and a "blessed hope."

"*Turn, my beloved, and be thou like a roe, or a young hart upon the mountains of Bether.*" She is still in the wilderness. Her trials are many. Like a country that is intersected with mountains and valleys, the pathway is difficult. She longs for her Beloved to come in power and glory, with the swiftness of the roe or the hart, on the mountains of division. What are the mountains and the valleys to the swift gazelle? They are as nothing. What are all the difficulties of Israel's full restoration to the Lord? They are as nothing. One gleam of His coming glory will strike

terror into the hearts of their enemies, and prepare the way for "the ransomed of the Lord to return and come to Zion with songs, and everlasting joy upon their heads. They shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away." (Isaiah xxxv. 10.) Then, "every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain; and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed and all flesh shall see it together; for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it." (Isaiah xl. 4, 5.) But, "*until*" that long looked for moment arrive, she prays to be maintained in the enjoyment of His love, and encompassed with His favour as with a shield. Blessed combination! Happy fruits of grace! Faith, laying hold on the word—hope, looking out for the first streak of day—prayer, for the present enjoyment of His gracious presence. She is pressing on, and would press through everything, that she may be actually with Himself.

Consider this, O my soul, meditate on these things. Is this thy condition? Having faith in the word of the Lord, art thou looking, longing, and waiting for His return? And is it thy constant prayer, to be maintained in His presence "until He come?" The hour immediately before the break of day, is said to be the coldest and darkest hour of the night. So will it be with the remnant of Israel in the latter day. "Alas! for that day is great, so that none is like it; it is even the day of *Jacob's trouble; but he shall be saved out of it.*" (Jer. xxx. 7.) But the first breath of morning will bring deliverance to the waiting, praying remnant, and destruction to their proud oppressors. "This

know also," says the apostle, writing for the Church, "that in the last days perilous times shall come." Happy they who are holding fast by the word—following the Lord and waiting for His coming. The last hour of the night may indeed be cold and dark, but heed it not, O my soul, weather it, watch, pray,—the morning will soon break—abide in thy watch-tower. Happy they who, with diligent, sleepless eye, catch the first radiance of the Morning Star!

"But ye, beloved, building up yourselves in your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life." Jude 20, 21.

CHAPTER III.

VER. 1. "*By night on my bed I sought him whom my soul loveth; I sought him but I found him not.*" The heart of the spouse is feeling the loneliness of the night while waiting for the dawn of the morning. She is thinking of the One who brings the morning with Him. But she has lost the sense of His nearness. This is failure. The conscience is awake—the affections are lively, "I sought him whom my soul loveth." Yet there is no joy—she is in trouble. Pray, why is this, O my soul? How should this be? Hast thou discovered, in thy meditations, the secret spring of this strange condition? A lively conscience—ardent affec-

tions, yet in darkness! There can only be one cause for such a state of soul—*the eye rests not on the Beloved Himself.* Apparently, there may be other causes, but this is the *real* one. Her eye has wandered, and she is in darkness—in felt loneliness. She has *rest* as to salvation; "*my bed*"—a resting place; though, for the moment, it is "*night*" with the soul.

It matters little, for the purposes of the enemy, on what the eye rests, if he can only get it off Christ. It may be occupied with the best of things, such as the work of the Lord, our brethren, brotherly love, the fellowship of saints. But even these things, blessed as they are, will lead to failure, if any one of them becomes the governing object of the heart in place of the Person of Christ. But what shall we say of self and the world coming in, in some of their ten thousand forms? Darkness, weakness, and sad confusion must follow.

Many have said, I know, with reference to such a state of soul, that it is the Lord *hiding* His face, that we may be tried, and that our affections may be quickened. We see no ground for such a conclusion as to the ways of the Beloved in the Song of Songs. Here, like the fine flour, He is *perfectly even* notwithstanding her changeableness. And, certainly, such a notion would be contrary to the plainest teaching in the Epistles. The same stroke of judgment that slew the Lamb, rent the veil; so that Christ and His redeemed entered into the "holiest of all;" and are in the light as God is in the light. Surely, Christ is in the light, never in darkness. And we are *where* He is, and *as* He is. "The darkness is past," as John tells us, "and the true light now shineth." And again, he says,

"As he is, so are we in this world." The veil is done away in Christ.

The soul, I admit, may feel when in darkness *as if* He had withdrawn Himself and was gone. But in such a case it is the soul that has withdrawn itself from Him; not the Lord that has withdrawn Himself from it. Of course, there will not be the same *manifestation* of divine love to the soul when it has lost sight of Him, as when it is closely following Him. As the Lord has said, "If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and *we* will come unto him, and make our abode with him." (John xiv. 23.) This is plain enough. The Lord is ever the same. He changeth not. When there is a change as to our communion—as to our enjoyment of Christ, it is entirely with ourselves. We may rest assured, that He will *manifest* to the fullest extent possible, the love that we can appreciate, so long as the eye is fixed on the *Person* of the Lord—so long as He is our object, our centre, light, love, peace, and joy fill the soul. But when the eye wanders—when He ceases to fill the full vision of our souls, darkness comes in; then follows, through the craftiness of the enemy, the numerous train of perplexing, agitating thoughts and feelings. "The light of the body is the eye; if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light." Matt. vi. 22.

Learn then, O my soul, from the experience of the spouse, this much-needed lesson, namely, "*That nothing short of the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ can ever satisfy the affections of the new nature.*" "Saw ye him whom my soul loveth?" is the natural, genuine cry of that nature, when Christ *Himself* is not seen.

The *form* of the cry may be different in each one, but the *cause* of uneasiness is the same in all. A single eye has not a double object. The Bride has got occupied, during the night, with something besides her Beloved. It may have been the wilderness—the weariness of the way—or it may have been with the anticipated glories of the breaking morn. But, certainly, it was not with *Himself*, as on a former occasion when she said, "A bundle of myrrh is my well-beloved unto me; he shall lie all night betwixt my breasts." *Then*, peace and joy filled her soul, and the sweet fragrance of His name was spread abroad. *Now*, restlessness and trouble, and her own failure is manifested.

Ver. 2, 3. "*I will rise now, and go about the city; in the streets and in the broad ways, I will seek him whom my soul loveth: I sought him but I found him not. The watchmen that go about the city found me; to whom I said, Saw ye him whom my soul loveth?*" Her position and her action are changed, but rest is not found. She has shaken off the spirit of supineness. Her cry is the language of a soul in earnest. But the streets and broad ways of the city, where watchmen are placed to maintain moral order, are not the places to find her Beloved. "He feedeth among the lilies." And this she well knew, only she is confused and agitated, as many have been in similar circumstances. The footsteps of the flock—the shepherds' tents—the budding grass—the mountain of myrrh—the hill of frankincense—the field—the garden—the beds of spices—the rural scenes, in contrast with the city, were His favourite haunts, and where he was to be found. But if her in-

activity was failure, her activity was a mistake. Had humiliation and confession followed the former, the latter might have been prevented. But, oh! who could fail to admire the fervour of her love, the fulness of her heart, and the honesty of her confession? Four times in these four verses, she speaks of "Him whom her soul loveth." But she never pretends to have found Him until she has, or to be happy until she is. Would to God we witnessed in all cases of failure, such affection, earnestness, and honesty. It was through the fervour of her affections that her failure was exposed. Oh! that every case of backsliding from the Lord, might be unveiled through the ardour of deep affection for the blessed, adorable Person of Christ!

But such are the affections of the Spouse for her Beloved that nothing save *Himself* could for a moment meet the need of her heart. And had she been in heaven, in place of the city, and not found Him there, it would have been just the same. She must have continued her search. And as she passed from scene to scene, and from glory to glory, still her question would be, to all she met in the shining way, "Saw ye him my soul loveth?" Heaven, in all its brightness, without Him, would not have satisfied the affections of her renewed soul. It was *Himself* she was seeking—the Person of her blessed Lord—and nothing else, nothing besides, could take His place. Only the love of the Saviour can satisfy the love of the saved—only the love of the Bridegroom can satisfy the love of the Bride. This is the ordinance of heaven—the wisdom and goodness of God. Thus the blessed Lord becomes the object and centre of all renewed hearts, as He is

God's; and also the object and centre of all their ways, as He has been, and ever will be, the one object, and sole centre of all the ways of God.

A deeply blessed, and most practical lesson may be learnt from this grand central truth. "Love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God, for God is love . . . . . Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit." (1 John iv. 7—19.) In the day of our regeneration, when "born of the Spirit," a new life is implanted in the soul, which finds its rest alone in Jesus. "Come unto me, I will give you rest." This is the rest of God, and of our new life. Above the world, above the clouds, above the storms, above the heavens, it rests on the bosom of the Beloved. Then, why is it that so many true Christians are strangers to solid peace and rest, not to speak of joy and love? Simply because Christ *Himself* is not the *one* object before the mind and the heart; and in all their ways, both human and divine. The uneasiness, the restlessness, the disquietude of true Christians is to be accounted for on this ground alone. The moment Christ gets his right place in the heart, everything else, consequently, drops into its own right place according to divine order. But if anything be allowed to come between the heart and Christ, the Holy Spirit is grieved, the soul is darkened, weakness and confusion follow, and the whole moral being gets out of order.

Jesus! thou art enough
The mind and heart to fill;
Thy life—to calm the anxious soul;
Thy love—its fear dispel.

O fix our earnest gaze,
So wholly, Lord, on thee,
That with thy beauty occupied,
We elsewhere none may see.

Ver. 4. "*It was but a little that I passed from them, but I found him whom my soul loveth: I held him, and would not let him go, until I had brought him into my mother's house, and into the chamber of her that conceived me.*" Great was the joy of the delighted Shelomith when she found her Beloved. "I found him." Blessed declaration! "I" a poor weak, wandering, worthless one, "found him." "Found Him"—who is the spring of all joy—the fountain of all blessedness. Her earnest, loving search is rewarded. It must be ever so. "He that seeketh findeth." When the heart is really turned to the Lord, it soon finds Him. It is His delight to reveal Himself to such, as He did to the loving Mary. He meets His Bride in the way. She sees Him—she embraces Him—she holds Him—she will not let Him go, until she has brought Him into her mother's house.

But great as was her joy, it was as nothing compared with His. At first sight, the joy may seem to be all on one side. But it was not so. In the proportion that we love, will be our sorrow in losing, and our joy in finding, the loved One. Blessed truth, when seen in Christ! What a field for meditation! What treasures may be found therein! Here, much may be learnt of the affections of the Lord, and of His deep sympathies with His people. Take an illustration.

Supposing the Bridegroom's love to be a hundred-fold greater than the Bride's, would His disappointment, on the occasion of her wandering, be a hundred-fold

deeper than hers who had wandered? Most assuredly. The affections characterize the disappointment or the joy. What was the proportion between the joy of the Father and the Prodigal when they met? Rather, what was the difference? Infinite! And so it must ever be, between the heart of the Lord and His people. Oh! how careful and watchful should we be lest we wander, and so grieve and disappoint the tender, loving heart of Jesus. And, oh! what a motive to repent and return, when we have wandered from Him, and thereby grieved and dishonoured His blessed name!

But who, it may be asked, is the *mother*, and what are we to understand by the *mother's house?* We have the answer plainly given in the prophecies of Hosea. "Say ye unto your brethren, Ammi: and your sisters, Ruhamah. Plead with your *mother*, plead." Israel as a nation is the *mother*. And when the long broken relations between the Lord and His ancient people are re-established, He will have entered the mother's house. But on these points we have already dwelt in our meditations more than once, and need not here further refer to them.

The spouse, or godly remnant of the nation, knowing His Bridegroom love, falls into His embrace. She could find no resting place until she found Him. And now, worn and weary with her wanderings, like the prodigal in the far country, she finds perfect repose in His changeless love. *His* heart is the only resting place of *hers*. "I charge you, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, by the roes, and by the hinds of the field, that ye stir not up, nor awake my love till he please." This charge was considered in our meditations on chapter

ii. 7. The same charge occurs in chapter viii. 4. Each time it is given the coming of the Lord immediately follows. In chapter ii. 7, it is the revelation of Himself. "The voice of my beloved, behold he cometh." It is Himself, *personally*, that is here thought of. In chapter iii. 5, it is the Messiah coming in royal procession, as the true Solomon, crowned King of Israel by the heart of the nation. "Behold King Solomon with the crown wherewith his mother (Israel) crowned him in the day of his espousals, and in the day of the gladness of his heart." In chapter viii. 4, the Bride is seen leaving the wilderness as *united* to Him. This is marked progress. "Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness, leaning upon her beloved?" This is all that the heart desires. It is the consummation of all happiness. To be with Him—one with Him—and like Him, is the full, perfect, and eternal blessedness of all His people.

From the sixth verse to the end of the chapter, we have a prophetic view of the Bridegroom coming out of the wilderness with His Bride. "Who is this that cometh out of the wilderness like pillars of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and frankincense, with all powders of the merchant." The Jews rise not, like the Church, to meet the Lord, in the air. He goes to where they are. The Spirit of prophecy tells us that they were in the wilderness together. It was there that He revealed Himself to her, in His unchanging love as the true Messiah. "Behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her." "And to the woman (the Jewish remnant) were given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the

wilderness, into her place, where she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time, from the face of the serpent." Hosea ii., Revelation xii.

And now, according to the prophecy under meditation, these "times" have run their course. The great events crowded up in these truly eventful years have been rapidly disposed of. The old serpent has been shut up in the bottomless pit, the beast and the false prophet have been cast into the lake of fire, and the rebellious nations have been judged. "The besom of destruction" has swept the empire of antichrist. What man *is*, has been fully proved. He is set aside for ever as a vessel of testimony, and Christ now comes to take the place of the faithful and true witness for God in the earth. The scene being thus cleared, the throne of the Son of David, the Prince of Peace, is set up. The Bride of the King is brought from her hiding place in the wilderness with royal honours. The sight is glorious! The morning breaks! The rising sun sheds his beams over the land. Jerusalem is filled with joy! Now they shall say, and the rapturous shout shall not die on their lips as it once did, "Hosanna! Blessed is the King that cometh in the name of the Lord."

"Resplendent Bridegroom, venerated Lord!
Prince of all kings! Eternal Sovereign!
Rich, wise, and royal. Solomon indeed!
Of thee—exclusively of thee and thine—
This Song of Songs, this hallowed Canticle!
Its thrilling tones, too little understood,
Treat not of earth's affections, but in type,
And shadowing forth of holy mysteries,
It speaks of the Beloved—the King of Peace—
Salem's Great Architect: it speaks of One
Who builds a temple to Jehovah's praise,

Which the descending glory shall pervade
And fill eternally—It speaks of One
Whose enemies shall all be clothed with shame,
While on Himself the universal crown
For ever radiates—It speaks of One
At whose high throne of peace and equity
Prayer shall be made, and happy nations bend,
Rejoicing in His sway of righteousness."

The royal procession moves on. The wilderness is left behind for ever. The sixth verse may be descriptive of the *graces* that shine in her. The smoking incense and the sweet spices give us the idea of praise, thanksgiving, and other fruits of the Spirit. Verses 7—10 may be more especially descriptive of the dignities, excellencies, and glories that belong to the King. The "bed" or "chariot" is the royal carriage. But mark, especially, it is the King's own workmanship. "King Solomon made himself a chariot of the wood of Lebanon." Christ provides everything, and prepares everything for His people. He leaves nothing for us to do, save to enter into that which He has finished. The cedar wood is typical of fragrance and incorruptibility. The "pillars" of strength. The "silver" of purity. The "gold" of divine righteousness. The "purple" of royalty. "Love" is the spring of all—God is love. "The daughters of Jerusalem" and "the daughters of Zion" may refer to the *cities* and *tribes* of Israel, for all which, divine love has paved the way for their national dignity, and millennial glory.

CHAPTER IV.

VER. 1. "*Behold, thou art fair, my love, behold thou art fair, thou hast doves' eyes, within thy locks; thy hair is as a flock of goats that appear from mount Gilead.*" When the woman touched the hem of the Redeemer's garment, the virtue that was in Him flowed out to her. (Mark v.) The finger of faith not only touched the border of His garment, but it touched the secret spring of His heart, which faith only can reach. All the treasures of that heart were thrown open to faith. Her case was "immediately" and perfectly met. The fountain of her disease was dried up, and all the streams cut off. "She felt in her body that she was healed of that plague." Yet she was without *peace* or *rest* of soul, to say nothing of *joy*. She fell at the feet of Jesus, "*fearing and trembling.*" Here, O my soul, pause a little, meditate, in the solitude of the sanctuary, on this instructive scene.

Is it possible, I ask, that all the virtue that is in the blessed Lord, may be possessed by a believer, and yet that believer be a stranger to peace? So it was with this dear woman before us, whose faith was great. And so it is alas! with thousands of the Lord's dear people now. Herein is a mystery unto many. How is it to be accounted for! The case of the woman is plain enough; and also gives the explanation of every other case. Although she had received for her need, all the virtue that was in Him, *she was still a stranger to the*

thoughts of His heart towards her. She needed the revelation of His heart to herself, to give her full peace in His presence. What she wanted, was the knowledge of *what He thought about herself.* And this is what every sinner needs, as well as the woman. He withholds nothing from the touch of faith. The first touch of faith secures for the soul all that He is Himself, and all that He has to bestow. But full repose of soul is only found in knowing the heart that surrendered all to win us for Himself. Then, but not till then, shall we be in the full repose of His love. Oh! to know His own thoughts about us! Oh! to know His love for us! "He loved me and gave himself for me," are the highest notes we shall ever sing.

But, one glance more at this blessed scene before leaving it. Only watch, for a moment, the outgoings of the Saviour's love, to this poor woman. Oh! who can understand the love that breathes in these words? "And he looked round about to see her that had done this thing." What love! His heart rejoices! He has gained His prize! From all eternity He had looked forward to that happy moment. The works of Satan are destroyed, God is glorified—grace shines, and faith triumphs. But His eyes must rest upon her. "Where is the one that has done this thing?" With what interest His eyes behold her! And now He reveals Himself to her heart, and fills her soul with the peace and joy of His salvation. "Daughter"—nearest and dearest of kindred—tenderest of human ties—thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace, and be whole of thy plague.

These reflections have been suggested while meditat-

ing on the first seven verses of this wonderful chapter. Here, the Beloved reveals to His loved one, in a remarkable way, the thoughts of His heart about herself —about her matchless beauty in His sight. Oh! for a circumcised ear and heart, to receive and retain for ever, the words He has chosen to express His admiration of His Bride. He sits, as it were, and gazes with enraptured delight, on each feature of His fair and beautiful spouse. He then speaks plainly to herself of His admiring love. "Thou hast ravished my heart, my sister, my spouse." Such praise from man would be most injurious, but when it comes from His lips, it only deepens our humility, and makes us more like Himself. It fills the soul with a calm and peaceful joy; it unites us more closely to His heart, and transforms us more into His image. It is the blessed foundation of closest fellowship.

After assuring her heart, in general terms, that she is "fair" in His sight, He enumerates *seven* distinct features, which He has been contemplating, separately, and minutely, with great delight. The eyes, the hair, the teeth, the lips, the temples, the neck, and the breasts. Each feature being perfect in itself He sees in her the assemblage of perfection and beauty. "Thou art *all* fair, my love, there is *no spot* in thee." The minuteness of the inspection manifests the boundless interest and delight He has in her. The number seven, too, gives the idea of fulness and completeness. But need we wonder? "The beauty of the Lord our God is upon us." In all parts and proportions, the believer is perfect in Christ's perfectness, and comely in His comeliness. He has put away all that was ours, and

given us all that is His own. Hence we are exhorted to *put off the old man*, and to *put on the new man*, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness. (Eph. iv. 22, 23, 24.) We will now briefly glance at the seven features separately.

"*Thou hast doves' eyes within thy locks.*" The dove was ceremonially clean. It only, of all the feathered tribe, was offered in sacrifice on God's altar. (See *Meditations*, chap. i. 14.) It is the understood emblem of humility, chastity, and harmlessness. "Thou hast doves' *eyes*." The eye is a term often used in scripture for spiritual light and understanding. "If therefore thine eye be single thy whole body shall be full of light." But there is one peculiarity about the dove's eyes which may be designed to teach the believer a needed lesson. It has a wonderful power of distant vision. It is supposed to see from an immense distance, its own dove-cot. Having been taken far from home, it may be seen when liberated from its cage, ascending very high—steadying itself in the air, until it has discovered its way back: it then flies straight and rapidly home. Oh! for this power of distant and heavenly vision, that, having seen by faith the risen Jesus, we may forget the things that are behind, and press on to those that are before. Christ, Himself, is the Christian's mark—but the "*mark*" must be seen, before we can take our aim. First, fix thine eye, O my soul, on the risen, exalted Man in glory. Then, "press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." (Phil. iii.) The similitude is easily understood—is it true of thee, my soul? This is the question, what is thine aim? what is thy course? what is thy progress?

Observe, the beautiful, bright eye of the Bride, glancing through her flowing tresses, meets the admiring eye of the Beloved, and ravishes His heart, "Thou hast doves' eyes *within thy locks.*" Her locks soften their brightness.

> "Thine are the locks, of which each single hair
> Draws nourishment distinctly, and has root
> In Him, the Head: of which not e'en the least
> Can e'er be injured to that Head unknown;
> Thine are the congregated ringlets, diverse each
> In form or fulness, yet containing each
> Units all separable; vital all
> And individual, howe'er amassed
> In throngs collective, and those throngs themselves
> Parts of a whole in fellowship with Christ,
> Round whom His people cluster; and from whom
> Derive those eyes of dove-like gentleness,
> That look benignant on the world around."

"*Thy hair is as a flock of goats, that appear from mount Gilead.*" The comparison here, may be to the long, glossy hair of the goats that graze on Mount Gilead, and to the circumstance of their *appearance* as a flock, or one united company, feeding on the rich pastures of the high places. The effect, to the eye, must have been *profusion* in each, and *unity* in the whole. "Long hair," the apostle tells us, is the covering and glory of the woman. 1 Cor. xi. 15.

But may there not also be a reference in this comparison, to the long hair of the Nazarite, which was the type of *power in the Spirit?* Samson's great strength lay in his *seven locks.* They were the symbol of his unbroken vow—of his consecration to God. Every believer is a Nazarite to God, in Christ, and ought to be one in practice. "I say unto you, I will

not drink of the fruit of the vine, until the kingdom of God shall come." (Luke xxii. 18.) This is the Nazarite vow of the blessed Lord; and every believer, being one with Christ, is under His vow. Herein lies the believer's strength, namely, in separation according to the law of the Nazarite. While Samson's seven locks were unshorn, the enemy could gain no advantage over him. The Spirit remained in power with him, so long as he kept the secret of his communion with God. But, alas, alas, how difficult for a Nazarite to retain his locks in the lap of Delilah. Alas, alas, that the foul fingers of a harlot should ever touch the locks of God's Nazarite! Seek, then, O my soul, by diligence, watchfulness, and prayer, to live and walk, in separation from the world, in fellowship with Christ, and in the *power of the Spirit;* that thy locks may never be shorn, and that the secret of thy communion may never be broken.

"*Thy teeth are like a flock of sheep that are even shorn, which came up from the washing: whereof every one bear twins, and none is barren among them.*" Here the comparison fitly represents every point of the feature with great perfection. In the sheep, *even shorn*, we have the encumbrance of nature removed—regularity, evenness. "Coming up from the washing"—cleanness, whiteness. They have been washed in the fountain that removes all uncleanness. The upper and under rows exactly correspond. They are "twins." "None is barren among them"—there is nothing wanting. The Bride can now eat the bread of life—the old corn of the land. She is of full age. The risen, exalted, glorified, and coming Messiah is the food

and nourishment of her soul. In the Lord's sight there is *evenness*, *purity*, *fruitfulness*, *nothing lacking* in the one He loves. What a mercy it is so, and that He tells us Himself, that it is so. "Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless his holy name."

"*Thy lips are like a thread of scarlet, and thy speech is comely.*" As the river of God's grace which flows through this world is deeply tinged with the blood of the cross, so should the conversation of the believer be. "I determined," says Paul, "not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ and him crucified;" and again, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Cor. ii. 2; Gal. v. 14.) Observe carefully, O my soul, the significance of this feature in holy scripture. And, oh! may a deep scarlet line thread its way through all thy conversation; so shall thy "speech be comely" to thy well-beloved.

Nothing could be more loathsome to the eye than the lips of the leper; such are the lips of nature to God. Leprosy is typical of the sin of our nature. The leper was to "put a covering upon his upper lip, and cry, unclean, unclean, ... he shall dwell alone; outside the camp shall his habitation be." (Lev. xiv.) Such, alas, is the representation of man's sad moral condition before God, however fragrant the lips, or comely the speech, to our common nature. But, oh! how changed when washed in the blood of the Lamb! in place of the white scaly lips of the leper, there is the pure, deep scarlet colour of the pardoned, healed, and purified believer. "And such were some of you; but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are

justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God." 1 Cor. vi. 11.

When Isaiah saw the glory of the Lord in vision, he was brought to see himself, morally, as a leper, and exclaimed, "Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts. Then flew one of the seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar; and he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged." Isaiah vi.

The bright scarlet thread that was bound in the window of Rahab, invites thy meditations. It speaks loudly, and distinctly, of the power of the blood of Christ; but, for the present, it may be left. More than ever, O my soul, let thy lips be preserved from everything that would mar their living freshness to the eye of Jesus, and also, in the sight of others. "Let your speech," says the apostle, "be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man." Col. iv. 6.

"*Thy temples are like a piece of a pomegranate within thy locks.*" The *heart* of the pomegranate is chosen to represent the temples of the Bride. "A *piece*," or broken part, "of a pomegranate," is the emblem. The fruit is said to be delicious to the taste; and when thus broken it presents a bright red colour, mingled with white. This comparison, I suppose, gives us the idea of modesty, shamefacedness, or blushing. Blessed change for the house of Jacob, whom the spouse repre-

sents. There was a time when the Lord had to say, of His ancient people, "I know that thou art obstinate, and thy neck is an iron sinew, and thy *brow brass*." (Isaiah xlviii. 4.) What a change, now! What has grace wrought? Now, the Lord sees in His loved One the perfection of meekness and lowly grace. Even her blushing temples are hidden by her flowing tresses. "Thy temples are like a piece of a pomegranate *within thy locks*." What sayest thou to this feature, my soul? Meditate thereon, and pray that thine adorning may "be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price." 1 Peter iii. 3, 4.

"*Thy neck is like the tower of David, builded for an armoury, whereon there hang a thousand bucklers, all shields of mighty men.*" The armoury of David was adorned with the trophies of his victories. He was a mighty man of war. The Lord delivered him out of the hand of all his enemies, and out of the hand of Saul. He subdued his enemies on all sides, and paved the way for the reign of peace, under Solomon, his son. But what were these compared with the victories of King Messiah? The entire book of God may be considered as the record of the victories of Christ. But the tower-like neck of the Bride, adorned with many jewels, symbolizes the trophies He has won, within the land of Judah. We read of Israel, as a *stiffnecked* people—as *wreathed about the neck* with the yoke of transgression—and as walking wantonly with *stretched forth necks*. Such illustrations represent a sad moral condition. But now, through the Lord's grace, the

change is complete—the triumphs of His love are perfect. The yoke of transgression is broken from off the neck of the daughter of Zion. In place of being *obstinate as an iron sinew*, it is graceful, beautiful, and stately, like the tower of David. "Awake, awake, put on thy strength, O Zion; put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem; . . . . . Loose thyself from *the bands of thy neck*, O captive daughter of Zion." (Isaiah lii. 1, 2.) And now the Lord delights to contemplate this beautiful feature of His Bride—graced, with many chains of honour; "Meet for the necks of them that take the spoil." The holy liberty, and perfect happiness of His people, will commemorate for ever the victories of His love.

"*Thy two breasts are like two young roes, that are twins, which feed among the lilies.*" This beautiful feature, the seventh in number, is the emblem, 1st, Of *moral development*—the formation of the heart for Christ—the affections drawn out to Him. 2nd, Of *nourishment*—the means of growth and blessing to others. The contrast between the spouse and "the little sister," of chapter viii. 8, is marked and instructive. "We have a little sister, and she hath *no breasts*." It is thought, by some, that the perfect development of the Bride, and its absence in "the little sister," represent the moral condition of Judah and Ephraim, or the two tribes and the ten. When the *twelve* are restored, the difference will be manifest. Nevertheless, the ten tribes will enjoy the blessed results of what has been done. Ephraim, however, will be a stranger to those deep exercises of heart, through which Judah has passed, in connexion with the Messiah; and, consequently, to the

moral development which these experiences give. It was after the captivity of the ten tribes, that Christ appeared and was rejected and crucified. And before His gathering of them out of all countries to bring them into their own land is completed, He will have made Himself known to Judah, as coming again in power and glory. The remnant, when the Messiah returns, will be chiefly composed of the tribe of Judah. The *twin roes* may represent unity of mind and heart in restored Israel, towards their long-looked-for Messiah. In feeding "among the lilies" they now find their delight, where He finds His. "*He* feedeth among the lilies." The heart is drawn out, and the affections are formed for Christ, through the manifestation of Himself to us, by the Holy Spirit. Oh! that our hearts—my heart—may desire this, more and more, that there may be a more perfect development of His love there.

Judah will thus become the means of nourishment and blessing, not only to the ten tribes, but to all the nations of earth. "Rejoice ye with Jerusalem, and be glad with her, all ye that love her; rejoice for joy with her, all ye that mourn for her: that ye may suck, and be satisfied with the breasts of her consolations; that ye may milk out and be delighted with the abundance of her glory. For thus saith the Lord, Behold, I will extend peace to her like a river, and the glory of the Gentiles like a flowing stream: then shall ye suck, ye shall be borne upon her sides, and be dandled on her knees. As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you; and ye shall be comforted in Jerusalem." Isaiah lxvi. 10—13.

The Bridegroom, having thus surveyed, with great

delight, the faultless beauty of His Bride, proposes to retire to his favourite scenes of resort—the mountain of myrrh, and the hill of frankincense. It would appear that she accompanies Him on this occasion. But whether she goes with Him or remains behind, He drops into her heart this blessed word, "Thou art all fair, my love; there is no spot in thee."

> "Thy warfare is accomplished. Christ has died!
> Thy sins, though scarlet, have been covered o'er
> With His free pardon and His snow-white robes;
> Cast into ocean is thy hated guilt;
> Abhorring evil, cleaving unto good,
> Lo! thou art fair! there is no spot in thee!"

Ver. 8. "*Come with me from Lebanon, my spouse, with me from Lebanon: look from the top of Amana, from the top of Shenir and Hermon, from the lions' dens, from the mountains of the leopards.*" We may sometimes, in our thoughtless wanderings, be much nearer the "lions' den" than we are aware of; yet wholly unconscious of our danger. Under the attractions of nature may be concealed our deadliest foes. We associate with "Lebanon," as a type, our highest thoughts of earthly exaltation. But *there*, that which is so fascinating to the outward eye, so charming to the senses, shelters the devouring lion and the cruel leopard. Its very luxuriance and beauty afford a covert for the enemy. The traveller, delighted beyond measure with the gorgeous scenery of *Lebanon* and *Hermon*, may be enticed to linger until it be too late to get safely to the plain. His danger thereby would be imminent, unless he had a good and faithful guide.

Here, O my soul, thou wilt do well to pause a little.

Bear in mind, that the fairest scenes of earth are infested by enemies more subtle and dangerous than the lions and leopards of Lebanon. Ponder the paths of thy feet. What of thy proneness to wander, to linger amidst the attractions of the scene around? Learn to know thine own weakness, thine own tendencies. Some of the Lord's people, thou mayest have observed, are drawn aside by *conformity to the world;* others, by *reading books* which fascinate the mind, but dry up the soul; and not a few, alas, are ensnared by following their *own will*, and the way that seems right in their own eyes. But they all alike lead to the "lions' dens, the mountains of the leopards," or, to scenes and occupations of imminent danger to the soul. There is one eye, and only one, that can detect the snare; one voice, and only one, that can withdraw the heart from the place of peril. "From the top of Amana, from the top of Shenir and Hermon," divine love would say, "Look unto me." Thus shall the world, as it were, underneath and unseen, be under thy feet. "*Amana*," observe, signifies *truth, integrity.* From *truth's* point of view, keep looking for thy Lord's return.

Nothing can be more beautiful and touching than the way the blessed Lord here seeks to call His Bride away from the scene of danger. "Come with me," are His words of matchless tenderness. He does not say, "Go! make haste, away, danger is near, thou art on the verge of the lions' dens." Oh, no, but, "Come!" "Come with me from Lebanon, my spouse, with me from Lebanon." He seeks to wean her heart away *from* Lebanon, the place of earthly delights but of spiritual danger. What ineffable grace there is in the word

"Come!" The whole sentence breathes the tenderest sympathies, the deepest solicitudes of His heart. How much sweeter to the ear is "Come," than "Go." There is fellowship in the one, there is separation in the other.

"Come thou and all thy house into the ark," said the Lord to Noah. He did not say, "Go thou," but "Come thou." The Lord, in grace, entered the ark before His servant, and, being there, He could say "Come;" and in this way the man of faith was assured that the Lord was with him in the ark of salvation. What a comfort to know that the Lord is with us in the ship, however much it may be tossed by the troubled waters. But further, to the rebellious house of Israel he says, "*Come now*, and let us reason together, saith the Lord." (Isaiah i. 18.) Mark also the gracious manner of His reasoning. When the invitation "Come" is obeyed, He puzzles them not with arguments, but sweetly says, "though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow: though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." Blessed way of reasoning for a guilty sinner! only the Lord can reason thus. The same grace, blessed be His name, we have displayed to the whole world, in that word of widest invitation: "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." No sooner is the word here proclaimed, believed, than the rest is secured. "*I will give you rest*"—rest from the burden of sin—rest from your own fruitless efforts—rest with myself in the paradise of God. Blessed Lord! would that that precious "Come" were more appreciated by those still at a distance. But the glory

and the praise of the grace is thine. Once more: who has failed to admire the beautiful wind-up of holy Scripture with its many "Comes?" "And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." Rev. xxii. 17.

But there are other *two words* in the Bridegroom's loving call, from which the heart may drink in the deepest joy, "*With me.*" "Come *with me.*" Could words possibly be found, better fitted to remove fear, and to fill the heart with confidence, whatever the circumstances might be? Impossible! If we have heard the lion's roar, and know that he is near, we may well be filled with alarm; for what power have we, in ourselves, to resist him? But these *three words* of matchless grace, "*Come with me,*" contain everything that the heart needs. *With Him* she is perfectly safe, however extensive the range of mountains over which she has to pass, and whatever the danger may be. But mere escape from the *lions' den*, is the very least mercy these *three words* unfold. They express the delight He has in her company. Her presence is His joy. Wondrous—blessed truth! This is the richest thought of all. His delight in us; His desire to have us with Himself! Not, of course, that He is dependent on, or indebted to, the creature for His supreme delight, for He is God as well as man, and suffices for Himself. He is the independent— eternal, living One; the Jehovah Jesus. But, as Son of Man, in wondrous grace and love, He has made us necessary to the full display of His glory, and His eternal delight. The

Church, which is His body, is His *fulness.* (Eph. i. 22, 23.) And to the daughter of Zion He also says, "Hearken, O daughter, and consider, and incline thine ear; forget also thine own people, and thy father's house: so shall the King greatly desire thy beauty; for he is thy Lord; and worship thou him." Psalm xlv. 10, 11.

This beautiful passage will be brought home to the heart of the spouse—the Jewish remnant—in divine power, when the Lord returns. He is seeking here, to turn away their thoughts and sympathies from the *old Jewish order of things*, "the father's house," that they may be entirely conformed to *the new order of things*, under the Messiah in His kingly glory. Israel's blessing will be on the earth, in Immanuel's land.

The Spirit of God has taken such pains to unfold this precious truth, "with Christ," that it may well invite thy meditations for a little while. It is established in the changeless purpose of God, and runs like a golden thread through every circumstance. "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not *with him* also freely give us *all things*." (Rom. viii. 32.) What a thought! "All things .... with Christ"—in fellowship with Him. Health or sickness—poverty or riches, I am in each state *with Him;* and have Him in each state. According to the Apostle's reasoning, the greater includes the lesser, and the lesser is possessed and enjoyed with the greater.

Should the Christian be so reduced in circumstances, as that a dry crust and a cup of cold water were his richest repast, yet he could triumphantly say, such as it is, I have it *with Christ*, and Christ with it. From

the lowest condition on earth to the highest pinnacle in glory, we have all *with Christ*, and our richest blessing is to be *one with Him*. So wondrous—so real—so perfect, is our *oneness with Christ*, the Church's head, that the Apostle says, "I am crucified with Christ." And of all Christians he says, "Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him." And in different parts of Scripture, he speaks of it under seven distinct aspects, which gives us the idea of divine completeness. 1. We are crucified together. 2. Quickened together. 3. Raised up together. 4. Seated together. 5. Heirs together. 6. Sufferers together. 7. Glorified together. And so precious to the heart of Jesus, is this oneness, or identity of the Church with Himself, that in each place where our future state is spoken of in Scripture, it is defined as being *with Christ*. "To-day shalt thou be *with me* in paradise." "Absent from the body, present *with the Lord*." "Having a desire to depart and to be *with Christ* which is far better." "And so shall we ever be *with the Lord*." "In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, *and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also*." Amen! This is rest, perfect rest, to the heart for ever. Refreshed, as if bathed in the ocean of His shoreless love, return to thy meditations on the beautiful Song of Songs, yet still to dwell on the volume of His heart, which only loves.

"Thy best repose on earth, is broken still;
Thy "Lebanon" invaded and disturbed
By leopard-spotted, watching enemies,
By roaring lions seeking to destroy;

But come with Me in communings divine,
And I will lead thee where destroying beast,
Nor noisome adversary can approach,
Where My redeemed, with everlasting songs
Triumphantly rejoicing, wave their palms
Of blood-bought victory around My throne
In bliss unspeakable—where sin is not,
Nor death, nor change, nor anything but joy.
My spouse, My purchased, from Amana look,
From Shenir and from Hermon look afar!
Fixed on the basis of the promises,
Be ever gazing on thy glorious rest."

Ver. 9—11. "*Thou hast ravished my heart, my sister, my spouse; thou hast ravished my heart with one of thine eyes, with one chain of thy neck. How fair is thy love, my sister, my spouse! how much better is thy love than wine! and the smell of thine ointments than all spices! thy lips, O my spouse, drop as the honeycomb; honey and milk are under thy tongue; and the smell of thy garments is like the smell of Lebanon.*" Matchless as were the various views from the top of Amana, Shenir, and Hermon—beautiful and enchanting to the eye as were these glorious fields of nature—fragrant with richest odours as were these spicy mountains; the eye and the heart of the Bridegroom turn from the contemplation of them all, to admire the loved one by His side. He sees in her what He can see nowhere else. *The feelings and affections of His heart, reflecting back on Himself from hers.* The beauties of the scene around them may be typical of those things which the men of the world esteem as most excellent, choice, and noble; but in the beauty and the love of the Bride, the royal Bridegroom finds His delight and satisfaction. He sees in her the blessed fruits of His own unquenchable love—of the

travail of His soul, and *is satisfied.* (Isaiah liii. 11.) Precious truth for the heart of every believer!

A man may have a very handsome estate, and value it much, but he can never have the same feelings towards it that he has towards his wife and children. *They* are a part of himself, not *it*. What were all the pleasures of paradise to the first Adam compared with his delight in his loved and beautiful Eve? She was part of himself, not creation. He had been cast into a deep sleep, and from his opened side an helpmeet was formed. When he awoke out of sleep and saw standing by his side the *fair one*, whom the Lord God, in His goodness, had provided for him, he exclaimed, "This is *now* bone of my bone, and flesh of my flesh." The blank was *now* filled up. He had seen nothing till *now* to suit his heart. The fair creation—the beauties of Eden, had been, as it were, a blank to the first man, until he possessed and enjoyed the blessed fruit of his typical sufferings and death.

But what was merely typical in the first man, was *real* in the second man—the last Adam. He was indeed cast into a deep sleep—the sleep of death; and as the fruit of His opened side, a second Eve, as it were, has been formed, all fair and spotless in His sight, who shall, ere long, share with Him, the joys and dominion of the new—the redeemed creation; and there, amidst its glories, reflect His love which was stronger than death, and bask in the beams of His cloudless favour for ever and ever. Need we wonder then at His enraptured admiration of her likeness to Himself? Almighty power could create a world; divine love alone, through suffering and death, could redeem a lost sinner.

Who can understand this love—this love to a poor, worthless sinner? But were it more the subject of thy meditations, O my soul, thou wouldst wonder less at these most marvellous words, "Thou hast *ravished* my heart, my sister, my spouse." And yet, with all that thou knowest now, or ever can know hereafter, these words must for ever be *most marvellous*. "Thou hast ravished my heart;" in the margin it is, "*taken away*." Amazing truth! The heart of Christ *ravished—taken away!* And by what—by whom? By the attractions of a sinner saved by grace—by one who has been washed in His own precious blood, and adorned with His own peerless excellencies.

This expression of the Saviour's love stands in the centre of the sacred volume, and is, in some respects, the most remarkable we have in Scripture. But the entire chapter, of which it forms a part, is, in some respects, a more wonderful unfolding of His love than we have anywhere else in the Book of God. As to *details*, there is nothing like the Song of Songs in any other part of the Bible. "Thou hast ravished my heart, my sister, my spouse." He now takes the place of *Brother* as well as *Bridegroom*. "My sister, my spouse." Blessed relationship! Happy union! Well known, and highly prized by Him, though as yet comparatively little known by her. But the main question here is one of heart—of feelings—of the Saviour's love, not to the Jew only, but to all who believe in Him. His association with the remnant, whom He speaks of as His sister, His spouse, is the occasion of its bright and full display. Amidst all that is beautiful, she alone attracts His eye; she is the contrast of all that is

to be found on earth, or amongst the angelic orders in heaven. We nowhere read of the heart of the Creator being ravished with the beauties of creation. This mystery of mysteries was left for the Redeemer and the redeemed.

Here love may meet a kindred heart,
But not a heart like thine;
Lord, from thy love I cannot part,
Nor canst thou part with mine.

Then speak the word—that gladdening word,
To bid us rise to thee—
To bid creation own her Lord,
And all His glory see.

A question, which has exercised some, very naturally arises here. Why is it that we have such a full and detailed expression of the love of Christ to the Jewish remnant in the Canticles, compared with the Epistles which are addressed to the Church of God, "the bride, the Lamb's wife?"

In the first place, the Canticles may be considered as the revelation of the heart of Christ to *all saints*, whether Jew or Christian, earthly or heavenly. Christ's love is perfect, and always perfectly developed according to the relationship in which we know Him. Under the allegory of Bride and Bridegroom-love, the feelings and affections of His heart are here expressed, and in perfect harmony with that position. King Solomon, in whose day there was something like a passing gleam of millennial glory, is the chosen and fitted vessel to represent these blessed realities. There is a *moral application* of the sayings of Christ in the Canticles, which is unspeakably precious to the Christian. Happy they who can drink at such a fountain!

The following remarks from the pen of another may be helpful to the study of this precious book, as to the *character* of the affections therein developed by the Jew, as compared with the Christian; and which may account for the *manner* of the Lord's love in this book.

"However strong these affections may be, they are not developed according to the position in which christian affections, properly so called, are formed. They differ in this respect. They do not possess the profound repose and sweetness of an affection which flows from a relationship already formed, known, and fully appreciated, the bonds of which are formed and recognized, that counts upon the full and constant acknowledgment of the relationship, and that each party enjoys, as a certain thing, in the heart of the other. The desire of one who loves, and is seeking the affections of the beloved object is not the sweet, entire, and established affection of the wife, with whom marriage has formed an indissoluble union. To the former, the relationship is the consequence of the state of the heart; to the latter, the state of heart is the consequence of the relationship. Now, although the marriage of the Lamb is not yet come, nevertheless, on account of the revelation which has been made to us, and of the accomplishment of our salvation, this latter character of affection is that which is proper to the Church. Praise and glory be to God for it! We know in whom we have believed."

In the second place, the relative position of the Jew to Christ in the Canticles, and of the Christian in the Epistles, is widely different, and needs to be known, or we shall fail both in our thoughts and affections, in that which is due to Him; and apply to the Church

that which relates to Israel, and to Israel that which belongs to the Church. *We* know the blessed truth of our *oneness* with Christ, as risen and glorified. "He that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit." (1 Cor. vi. 17.) *Oneness in life and position* with Christ glorified, goes far beyond what the apostle calls "the Jews' religion." Even *now*, at this present time, we know that we are sitting in the heavenly places in Christ. And though here on the earth poor, faulty, failing ones, we know that we are *sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise*, which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession. (Eph. i.) But what is sweeter far than all besides, we know the greatness of His love, according to the sacrifice by which He has brought us into this heavenly position and everlasting association with Himself. Hence we know the complete settlement of the question of sin—full and everlasting forgiveness, perfect justification, and acceptance in the Beloved. Christ was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification. (Luke vii. 48; John v. 24; Acts xiii. 38, 39; Rom. iv. 25.) Our redemption is accomplished, relationship is already formed; we only wait for glory—the marriage of the Lamb. We count on His promise, "Surely I come quickly." "For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry." But while waiting for His coming, we know and enjoy, though feebly, through the power of the Holy Ghost, the affections of His heart, which properly belong to that unspeakably, blessed, and eternally established relationship.

Israel's position, in the Canticles, as brought out by

the Spirit of prophecy, comes far short of this. There is no question, however, of the purification of the conscience. Pardon and justification are not touched upon. It is more a question of the heart—of the creating, forming, and drawing out of the affections for the Person of the Beloved. The knowledge of Himself and the certainty of relationship are not yet fully entered into or enjoyed; and these are the very things which the heart that loves so earnestly desires and looks forward to. The Bridegroom, of course, knows the relation in which he stands to her, whom He calls, "My sister, my spouse." Hence the wonderful unfolding of His heart directly to herself, that she may know the purposes of His love. He assures her, and re-assures her of her beauty, value, and preciousness in His sight. And even when she has failed through forgetfulness of Him and His love, He meets her with an affection that cannot be turned away from its object. Thus her heart is exercised through the manifestation of His love, grace, tenderness, and kindness; her affections are thereby deepened, He is exalted above all others in her eyes, and appreciated as the "chiefest among ten thousand . . . . . yea, the altogether lovely." Her heart is thus gradually formed for Himself, and that by the revelation of His. The forty-fifth psalm is the celebration of this blessed result. There, the remnant—the Jews—are greeted as the "*fellows*" of the King, and Jerusalem as "the queen in gold of Ophir." The nations now honour her with their presents, and entreat her favour. She is now in the closest relationship with the King; and received into the ivory palaces. But we return to our text.

"Thou hast ravished my heart with *one of thine eyes*, with *one chain of thy neck*." What the Lord here means by the words "one of thine eyes, one chain of thy neck," may be difficult to determine. He may refer to His appreciation of each single grace, and each spiritual ornament in the believer; or, to His delight in each believer, individually, as well as in His people collectively. The least of all saints can never be overlooked by Him, or undistinguished from others, either in time or in eternity. We are loved as individuals, saved and glorified as individuals. This truth is clearly taught in Luke xv., and John also speaks much of our individual blessing, the *family* of God being his principal theme, as the *Church* of God is Paul's, and the wilderness journey Peter's, yet it is Paul who says, "who loved me, and gave himself for me." Paul here speaks as if he were the only one that Christ loved and died for. Faith appropriates what grace reveals. It is only in this way that the heart enjoys the revelations of grace. Understandest thou this, O my soul? It is all-important. This is the province of faith alone. It makes the blessing, however great, personal. No matter what grace reveals in Christ, as the children's portion, faith is sure to say, "It is mine."

But in our happy home above, not only shall we be known *personally* to the blessed Lord, but to each other. Peter seems to have had no difficulty in recognizing, on the Mount of Transfiguration, which was Moses and which was Elias. So must it be in the resurrection state, where all is perfection. A thorough distinction of persons will be manifest there. Paul will never be taken for Peter, nor Peter for Paul; and each will have

his own crown and glory. Blessed, yet solemn thought! each saint will have his own crown. All will be known there for what they are in the estimation of the Lord. Yet all will be perfect, all happy, all in the full joy of the Lord, and all shining brightly in His glorious image, which all shall then perfectly bear.

"*How fair is thy love, my sister, my spouse!*" Were our meditations on the Lord's *appreciation* of our love, more deep, earnest, and simple, we should be more undivided in heart for Him. Love begets love. It is the fire I sit at that warms me. The nearer the fire the warmer I am. The nearer I am to the heart of Christ, the warmer will be my own, and the more intense the flame of love to Him. As well might I think of getting warmed by going out to the garden and looking at the snow, as getting more love to Christ by looking to myself, thinking of myself, and trying to increase my love for Him. But, somehow, many say, I do not grow in love to Him, and in appreciation of His love to me, and I do desire to feel more love to Him. Well, then, if it is the fire I sit at that warms me, it is also the food I eat that satisfies me. Let thy soul then *feed on Christ*. And a rich repast thou wilt find in this wonderful chapter. Meditate thereon. It will bear being studied, word by word. And oh! think of the heart that each word flows from. Unbelief lets the words of Christ go for nothing, faith feeds on them. But be sure and rise in thy meditations to the heart whence they flow. Ever study His words in fellowship with Himself. Beware of separating the word from the Person of Christ. Thus shall thy love increase, and thy practical conformity to Himself grow exceedingly.

To know how highly He values our love, should lead us to the contemplation of that which will nourish and strengthen it. "How fair is thy love, my sister, my spouse! How much better is thy love than wine! and the smell of thine ointments than all spices." If such revelations of His love win us not, what will? There is no wine, no joy of earth, so pleasant to Him, as the love of His spouse. No odour so sweet, as the smell of her ointments. He tells her they surpassed "all spices." The hospitalities of the self-righteous Jew were nothing to Him, compared with the love of the fallen one at His feet. But such fruit of the Spirit will only grow in the light of His presence. Plants never grow well in the dark. They may produce a few pale, sickly leaves, but that will be all. Fruit and fragrance will only be found when the plant has the full benefit of the light of heaven. "I am the light of the world," says Christ, "he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." "He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit; for without me, ye can do nothing." John viii. 12; xv. 5.

The honeycomb must first be filled by patient industry before it drops. The honey must be gathered from every flower. Such should be the habit of the Christian; learning something from almost everything. But, alas, we too much resemble the butterfly, and too little the bee. The former may be seen hovering over the flower for a little, then flying off without tasting its sweetness, while the latter fastens down upon it, and sucks the honey out of it. Thus her storehouse is filled by little and little. The word must be carefully studied, and the heart well stored, before the word

suited for the occasion lies ready under our tongue. As the fruit of the Spirit, the Lord is refreshed and delighted in finding it so. "Thy lips, O my spouse, drop as the honeycomb; honey and milk are under thy tongue; and the smell of thy garments is like the smell of Lebanon." The *dropping* of the honeycomb may suggest the idea of a thoughtful selection, in contrast with "the multitude of words" spoken of in Proverbs. Words are like seeds, they germinate, and bear fruit; whether they be sharp and bitter, or good and wholesome words. How important then, to sow good seed. If we sow tares we cannot reap wheat; and if we sow wheat we shall never need to reap tares. "For whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." Oh! to be ever dropping the words of kindness, gentleness, meekness, truth, faith, hope, and charity. What is purer than milk? What is sweeter than honey? What more nourishing than the one? What more healing than the other? The blessed Lord owns us in the Spirit, and not in the flesh, and here speaks of the precious fruits of the Spirit which are so delightful to Him. Into His own lips "grace is poured," and all His "garments smell of myrrh, aloes, and cassia, out of the ivory palaces." And He finds, to His supreme delight, in His beloved spouse, the perfect answer to Himself. "Grace for grace"—grace answering to grace, which is sweeter far to His heart, than all the productions of nature. When the hills and valleys of Canaan, so redolent with "all spices," and "flowing with milk and honey," shall have passed away, the loved one before Him shall abide in His presence, with increasing freshness and fragrance for ever and ever.

"Make thy word sweetness to our inmost souls—
Open our mouths, and let it thence distil,
That all may know thee, love thee, and adore!
Be as the dew unto thine Israel!
Clothe them with goodly raiment like thine own—
Perfumed with such a fragrance from on high,
That none can come within their influence,
Without perceiving they have been with thee,
And from thy cedar-palaces received
Odours peculiar to those sacred heights,
Which from this lower world are separate!"

Ver. 12—14. "*A garden enclosed is my sister, my spouse; a spring shut up, a fountain sealed. Thy plants are an orchard of pomegranates, with pleasant fruits; camphire, with spikenard, spikenard and saffron; calamus and cinnamon, with all trees of frankincense; myrrh and aloes, with all the chief spices.*" A few moments' meditation on the *physical* position and character of the land of Israel, will greatly help to the understanding of these beautiful, and instructive comparisons. In the centre of the habitable world the promised land is said to be situated. A chosen spot of great natural beauty and fruitfulness. It is also important to observe that the *locality* of the Jews is not the result of accident, but of divine arrangement. Hundreds of years before Israel had any national existence, "the Most High," in marking off the boundary lines of the different nations of the earth, reserved for His chosen people this central place.

The following passage clearly proves this important point. "When the Most High divided to the nations their inheritance, when he separated the sons of Adam, he set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel. For the Lord's portion is his people; Jacob is the lot of his inheritance." (Deut.

xxxii. 8, 9.) Much may be gathered from this interesting truth, as to the place which Israel occupies in the thoughts and purposes of God. This central spot has already been the scene of events, far surpassing all others in their importance and results; and it shall yet be the scene of events, for which the heavens and the earth are waiting, and to which all Scripture points. The prediction which appears only as a *bud* in Eden, shall be displayed in its *full-blown* glories in the promised land.

Through the failure of Israel, the land, we know, is now lying waste. It presents anything but the idea of a centre; it is trodden underfoot of the Gentiles; but though it has long been like a wilderness, and the shadow of death, it will not always be so. The Lord of that once goodly land is now absent; He has gone to the "far country;" but He will return and take possession of His own. (Luke xix.) "The land is mine," saith the Lord; and, according to His original intention, it will become, in due time, the centre of all nations—the glory of all lands—the praise of all people; and His beloved Jerusalem shall be the metropolis of the whole earth, and the centre of blessing to all who dwell therein. The royal banner shall then float over its bulwarks, as the certain token that the "Nobleman" has returned—that the King of Nations is there.

From the top of Pisgah Moses was privileged to see this goodly land before he died. The Lord Himself showed it unto His servant Moses. What grace! What condescension! What an honour conferred on Moses! "I have caused thee to see it with thine eyes, but thou shalt not go over thither." (Deut. xxxiv.)

He was permitted, before closing his eyes in death, to survey the future dwelling-place of the Lord's redeemed—to see its fertile valleys—its beautiful mountains—and its well-watered plains. In describing the country, under the guidance of the Spirit, he says, "For the Lord thy God bringeth thee unto a good land, a land of brooks of waters, of fountains and depths that spring out of valleys and hills; a land of wheat and barley, and vines, and fig-trees, and pomegranates; a land of oil olive and honey; a land wherein thou shalt eat bread without scarceness, thou shalt not lack anything in it; a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills thou mayest dig brass." Deut. viii. 7—9.

From the rich and varied productions of the Holy Land, the comparisons of our text seem to be drawn. The spouse of the Lord is here likened to a "garden," an "orchard," a "fountain;" so replenished is she with all that is pleasant and fruitful to Him—so varied are the graces of the Holy Spirit in her—there is abundance for the heart of her Lord. "Spikenard and saffron: calamus and cinnamon, with all trees of frankincense; myrrh and aloes, with *all the chief spices*." What a truth for thy meditations, O my soul; ponder it well! Look at its different parts. The "garden," may be celebrated for its choice collection of flowers, aromatic shrubs, and all pleasant plants. The "orchard," for all manner of trees, bearing precious fruit, and the "fountain," that which irrigates the whole scene. Every leaf is bedewed and moistened from the living fountain of waters. What a breadth and depth of thought this should give us, of what the people of God ought to be

for Him, in this world! Like the choicest of gardens, compared with the barren, "waste howling wilderness," should the people of the Lord be, in comparison with the people of the world. Well, how is it with thee, my soul? Is there freshness, growth, fruitfulness, in the things of the Lord? Can He come into the garden of thy heart, and eat His pleasant fruit? Known unto Him are all thy thoughts and ways.

But further observe, the delighted heart of the Bridegroom describes His spouse as "A garden *enclosed*—a spring *shut up*—a fountain *sealed*." She is all, and only for Him. Her eyes wander not after another. She is perfectly content with her portion, in her Well-beloved. Christ is enough. He is a complete covering to her eyes—the perfect filling up of her whole heart. No wishful, no inviting look is cast on any other. Contentment fills her soul. "I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine: he feedeth among the lilies." The bloom, the fragrance, the fruit are for Him and Him alone. Her garden is closed against all others—the royal seal is affixed on the King's fountain; the living waters spring for Him alone. "*Know that the Lord hath set apart him that is godly for himself.*" (Psalm iv. 3.) No stranger must be allowed to tamper with that on which the King's seal is affixed. "Nevertheless the foundation of the Lord standeth sure, having this *seal*, the Lord knoweth them that are His. And let every one that nameth the name of Christ *depart from iniquity*." (2 Tim. ii. 19.) "My son, give me thine heart," is a fair demand. O, hearken, my soul, to the voice of wisdom. When *this demand* is complied with, we can have no heart for the world. No man has two

hearts. Although, alas! we sometimes seem to have two. Let me watch against this. If the blessed Lord has my heart, I can have none for the world. A divided heart He cannot accept. Rather, let me say, Had I two, He should have them both.

"Ah! in what rugged and neglected spots,
Passed over in thy culture, often grew,
Unnoticed and unknown to all but me,
The richest fruits—humility and love,
The myrrh of penitent and contrite hearts,
The spices exquisite of trust and praise—
Grief was a winepress forcing the rich juice
Of grapes I watched maturing from the bud;
Bruised, they gave forth the wine of thankful love;
Despised or disappointed, "IT IS WELL,"
Was all the sufferer's utterance. Drank I not
Holy enjoyment in those crushed-down saints?
Milk, too, I tasted—many a tiny cup
Was filled to overflowing for my joy
With thoughts and promises of Holy Writ,
....My Father's word
Earnestly studied, carefully retained,
Believed, beloved, securely trusted in—
Rejoiced my spirit while supporting theirs."

The words "enclosed," "shut up," "sealed," forcibly suggest the thought of the believer's entire and well-defined separation from the world. Like a piece of ground that has been reclaimed from the common around; well fenced, well planted, well cared for; and kept for the owner's especial use and pleasure. Though *in* the world, the Christian is not *of* the world. As Christ Himself says, "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world." He is there as the servant of Christ, and should learn to do all things for Him. "And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the

name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him." (Col. iii. 17.) No matter what it is, from the smallest thing to the greatest, he is to do all as *service to Christ.* Will this be *service to Christ?* is the question. Not, merely, what harm is there in doing this or that? and then doing our own will in place of the Master's.

The Apostle Paul could say, "For me to live is Christ." As if he had said, "For me to live, is to have Christ as my motive, Christ as my object, Christ as my strength, and Christ as my reward." This would be separation from the world, and yet rendering the best service possible in the world. When the eye is kept steadfastly fixed on the Person of the Beloved, the heart is kept full of Him—the conscience is clear—the judgment sound, and our service fruitful. The closer we are to the fountain-head ourselves, the surer we are to become the channels of blessing to others. Like the spring in the desert, or the river in the valley, it benefits the region around. "If any man thirst," says Jesus, "let him come unto me and drink." "He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. (But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified.") John vii. 37—39.

From the heart thus filled with Christ, through the indwelling of the Holy Ghost, a blessed testimony will be given to the risen and glorified Jesus. It should flow forth like "rivers of living water." For this testimony the believer is responsible to his absent Lord. "He that saith he abideth in him, ought himself also

so to walk, even as he walked." (1 John ii. 6.) Here we enter on the ground of true christian *responsibility*. Being a Christian, I am responsible to walk as one. Not that I may become one, bless the Lord! but because I am one. What a mercy! we are not responsible to *gain* a place in the divine favour. The blessed Jesus has accomplished this. But being, through His precious blood, in the place of perfect favour—perfect peace, joy, and acceptance, we ought to walk according to the position in which grace has set us. Being a child of God, I ought to walk as a child of God. And being a servant, I ought to walk as a servant.

Our responsibility as men—as children of the first Adam—was perfectly met by our blessed Lord when He died for us; and now, all our responsibility flows from our relationship to Christ—the last Adam, risen and glorified. "As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you." (John xx. 21.) This commission, observe, was given by the risen Jesus to the *disciples*, not to the *apostles* only. And for this mission we must give an account to Him at last. Most solemn truth! But wholesome to be known, and borne in mind. "Every one of us shall give account of himself to God." (Rom. xiv. 10—12.) It may be well to make two or three remarks here with reference to the *judgment-seat of Christ*, as we have found many souls confused and troubled on this subject.

In the first place, the *person* of the believer can never come into judgment. He has "passed from death unto life." (John v. 24.) He is "justified from all things;" Christ was delivered for his offences; and where are they? all gone, and gone for ever. His name be praised!

He was raised again for his justification; and what then? Being raised up together with Him, he is associated with a risen Christ, in His eternal life, and in His acceptance before God. "There is therefore, now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." (Rom. iv., v., viii.) The believer himself, then, can never be brought into judgment. Besides, when he appears before the tribunal of Christ, he will be in his body of glory. He shall then be like the blessed Lord Himself. "Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself." (Phil. iii. 21.) How far, how very far, this glorious truth removes all thought of judgment, as to the *person* of the believer, I need not say. He is glorified before he is called to the judgment-seat, and knows well that he is a co-heir with Christ, and in the same glory with Him.

Secondly. *The sins and iniquities* of the Christian can never be brought into judgment. Christ has already borne their judgment on the cross, and put them all away for ever by the sacrifice of Himself. There will be no *second* judgment of the believer's sins. A full end has been made of all sins, confessed by us, and borne by Jesus. (Heb. ix., 1 John i. 9.) "Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed." (1 Peter ii. 24.) So complete—so perfect, was the work of Christ on the cross, as the substitute of His people, that not the least question as to sin, was left unsettled. Every question was *for ever closed* when He exclaimed, "*It is finished.*"

On the ground of this gloriously finished work, divine love meets the chief of sinners, in all the riches of the grace of God. And so great is this love towards the sinner, who pleads, before God, the name of Jesus, and trusts only to His precious blood, that not only are his sins and iniquities all *forgiven*, but they are said to be *forgotten*. "Their sins and iniquities will I remember no more. For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified." (Heb. x.) Such is the power, the potency of love, over all our sins, that they are gone from the recollection of Him who loves, and can never come into judgment.

Thirdly. But although neither the *person*, nor the *sins and iniquities* of the believer, are the subjects of the Lord's judgment at that day, his *works*, as the Lord's servant, must all be brought up before the tribunal of Christ. Hence the faithful word of warning by the Apostle, "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord." (1 Cor. xv. 58.) He has been dwelling at great length on the resurrection of the body, now he touches on what may be called *the resurrection of works*. "Every man's work shall be made manifest; for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; *and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is*." (1 Cor. iii., iv.) But this trial of the *quality* of our works, should not be thought of with fear and dread, but as one of our greatest privileges; because then shall be fulfilled that precious word, "*But then shall I know even as also I am known*."

God is light and God is love. He is all love—all

light for his children. But His love will have them in the light as He is Himself. This will be perfect blessedness; because we shall then be in the perfect light as well as the perfect love of God. "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all." Our new, our divine nature loves the light—delights in it. The least darkness would be an insupportable burden. To be in the light, is to be manifested, for light makes manifest. Nothing can be concealed there. And we would not, blessed be His name, have one moment of our history with His tender, gracious dealings towards us, left in the dark. The heart shrinks from the very thought, notwithstanding all our weakness and naughtiness. "For we must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad." (2 Cor. v. 10.) When the whole course of my life is manifested in the perfect light of God—of God in Christ, "*Then shall I know even as also I am known.*" My judgment of all that was good and bad in that life, will be according to the perfect judgment of God.

All that has been done for Christ, as the fruit of His grace in us, shall be approved and rewarded by Him. That which has been done merely in the energy of nature cannot be owned, but must now be consumed as "wood, hay, stubble." All that has been produced by the spirit of Christ in us shall abide for ever, as "gold, silver, precious stones." (1 Cor. iii. 10—13; iv. 1—5.) Much self-denying, cross-bearing service, which has been gone through by many from the best of motives, but the means used unsanctioned by Scripture, shall then be analyzed with divine accuracy. All that the

Lord can own as good He surely will, and abundantly reward. And many a holy purpose of the heart, which had for its object the Lord's glory, but which was never accomplished, shall then be brought to light and have its full reward. The smallest service done for Him on earth shall not be overlooked in that day. "For whosoever shall give you a cup of water to drink in my name, because ye belong to Christ, verily, I say unto you, he shall not lose his reward." (Mark ix. 41.) If A. has given one, and B. two cups of cold water, B. shall have a double reward. It will also be made manifest in that day, what it was that *prevented* us from doing more good, considering the light we had, the opportunities enjoyed, the grace bestowed, and the operations of the Holy Spirit in us. Nevertheless, each one will have the place prepared for him of the Father. But never till that moment shall we know how much we owe the blessed Lord. Then, but not till then, shall we know what He has been for us, and what He has had to bear from us. Then will be seen, in the true light of His presence, the love of that heart which ever rose above all our unworthiness, and manifested itself in patient grace, tender love, and unwearied goodness. And then, too, will be seen the ten thousand times ten thousand instances in which we sought, in the pride of our hearts, to please ourselves, exalt ourselves, make something of ourselves, in place of serving the Lord Jesus, exalting Him, and making Him our all in all.

The long-suffering, patient, tender love of Jesus in thus bearing with us for so many years, will be known and understood in all their perfection. And the sweet recollections of a love, far surpassing all others in ten-

derness, shall then fill our souls with the most perfect admiration, fervent adoration, and enraptured praises for ever.

And not unknown, or forgotten in that day, will be His many—His miraculous interpositions on our behalf, and wondrous deliverances during our unconverted days. Many a time when Satan had beguiled us to the very brink of hell, and thought that another push would send us in, the mighty, loving, adorable Jesus, threw the arm we were despising around us—saved us—and gently led us back from its slippery edge. Oh! with what overflowing hearts shall we retire from this privileged scene—*the tribunal of Christ!* Oh! what material it will have supplied for the praises of heaven! Now we shall know the use of our golden harps. And the spring of joy which has been opened there, shall flow on, with ever deepening fulness and freshness, throughout a long, bright, and happy eternity.

There are other two distinct sessional judgments spoken of in Scripture, which it may be well just to notice, to prevent confusion. 1. The judgment of the *living nations*, "when the Son of man shall come in his glory." (Matt. xxv. 31—46.) This takes place at the commencement of the millennium. 2. The judgment of the *dead*, before the "great white throne," when heaven and earth flee away. (Rev. xx. 11—15.) This takes place at the close of the millennium, and is quite distinct from the judgment of the *living nations*, and from the judgment of the saints in heaven, before the tribunal of Christ. The notion of *one general judgment* of the righteous and the wicked, has not the sanction of Scripture.

Now, at this present time, we should walk by faith in the light of that future day. The threefold effect of this truth on the mind of the apostle is worthy of our special attention. "Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are made manifest unto God; and I trust also are made manifest in your consciences." 2 Cor. v. 11.

1. Knowing what a terrible thing it must be for a sinner to appear before God in his sins, and under a responsibility entirely his own, the apostle is stirred up to preach the gospel with great earnestness. "We persuade men." He seeks to warn—to impress others, with the immediate and unspeakable importance of salvation. What an awful thing it must be for an unbeliever to answer personally for His rejection of Christ and salvation. Who would not be aroused to deep, soul-stirring earnestness, in the preaching of the gospel, by such a consideration?

2. The apostle was already in the light—already manifest unto God. "But we are made manifest unto God." The judgment-seat bore no terror for the apostle. It only stirred him up to greater zeal for the salvation of others.

3. Thus walking in the light, the man of God—the servant of Christ, goes on with his work; his conscience, meantime, reflecting the light and the love of God. He commends himself to the consciences of those amongst whom he labours. "And I trust also are made manifest in your consciences." Oh! that these blessed, precious, and practical results may flow to thee, my soul, and to many others, from thy meditations on *the tribunal of Christ*. And to this end may we expe-

rience the various operations of the Holy Spirit, as referred to in the following words of the blessed Lord.

Ver. 16. "*Awake, O north wind; and come, thou south; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out.*" The word "wind" is sometimes used in Scripture, in reference to the Holy Spirit; and this verse is like the Lord praying for the different operations of the Spirit, in the hearts of His beloved people. "Blow upon my garden that the spices thereof may flow out." There are spices—"chief spices" in His vineyard, but something is needed to cause them to flow out. He has just been walking in His garden, surveying His pleasant plants, and calling them by their names.

He knows well every plant in His vineyard—when planted—what care it has received, and what fruit should be forthcoming. They are all of His own right hand planting, "that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he might be glorified." Psalm lxxx. 15; Isaiah lxi. 3.

> "Like trees of myrrh and spice we stand,
> Planted by God the Father's hand:
> And all His springs in Zion flow,
> To make the young plantation grow."

But sometimes a death-like stillness comes over the whole plantation, and both old and young are affected by it. The balmy branches yield not to the breath of the Spirit, so that the rich perfume is not collected by, and carried on, the breeze. "Awake, O north wind; and come, thou south;" is now the patient husbandman's

cry, "blow upon my garden." A sharp, keen blast from the north, or the genial gales of the south, may be employed to awaken, quicken, and arouse the Lord's people from a state of sad supineness. But, oh! sweet thought! He to whom the garden belongs, and who knows well every plant that is in it, holds in his hand the breath that fans, and the whirlwind that sweeps. And for all His tender, precious plants He carefully adjusts the due proportion of the north and the south wind.

> Happy enclosure! where the piercing gale
> Nips but the budding weeds, while, kept secure,
> The cultured plants are refuged from all ill,
> To flourish in the soft succeeding calm!

"A little while," and they shall all be transplanted to the more genial clime of the paradise above. There the piercing north wind of affliction, chastening, and discipline shall no longer be needed. There will be nothing in those cloudless regions to wither the leaf, nip the bud, blight the blossom, or stunt the fruit. Enough, O enough, of all this sad and sorrowful work, have we had in this cold world of ours! Come, O come; hail, happy day, when far, far away from the wilderness, where trial often comes like a terrible blast, as if it would up-root the feeble plant; and where sorrow often fills the heart, and shame covers the face, because we have been so fruitless in that which is good, and so fruitful in that which is evil; but *then*, all evil shall be done away; no grief, no canker, no worm there. Rooted in the pure soil of heaven, and continually drinking in the dews of eternal love, we shall bloom and bear fruit to the ineffable delight of our Father's heart—the unutterable

glory of our blessed Lord, through the abiding presence of God the Holy Spirit with us.

Lord, grant that *now* my heart may be entirely inclined to the culture which thou seest to be the best; that my heart may bow to every breath of thy Spirit, and that there may be such fruit and fragrance in my life as shall afford thee pleasure. Oh! to be ever free to say, "*Let my beloved come into his garden and eat his pleasant fruits.*" These few are the only words which we have from the lips of the Bride in this wonderful chapter. But they are happy, blessed words. "My beloved." She is at home and happy in His presence. He, Himself, is hers. She knows it. She enjoys it. He is her own beloved Lord and Saviour. "My beloved." But when she speaks of the garden, she calls it "His garden." And of the fruit she says, "His pleasant fruit." This is true ground, as we elsewhere read, "My well-beloved hath a vineyard in a very fruitful hill. And he fenced it, and gathered out the stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest vine, and built a tower in the midst of it, and also made a wine press therein." And again, speaking of His care of that vineyard, which proved so unfruitful to Him, He says, "I the Lord do keep it: I will water it every moment, lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day." Isaiah v.; xxvii.

In John xv., the blessed Lord speaks of Himself as the "True Vine," His people as the "*branches*," and His Father as the "husbandman"—the vinedresser. Oh, what a wondrous sight! The Father looking down from heaven beholds, all over the habitable world, His own beloved Son bearing fruit to His glory, through

the many branches of this goodly vine! What a wide-spreading vine! It is only through the supply of the rich juices from the parent stock that the branches bear fruit. What a lovely sight to the Father's eye! What a constant care for the Father's heart! But, oh, how rewarded when He sees the branches thus vitally connected with His Son, "*filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ unto the glory and praise of God.*" (Phil. i. 2.) "*Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit.*" John xv. 8.*

* Besides these practical reflections on the *north and south winds*, note also, O my soul, for thy further and future meditations, the frequent reference in the prophetic scriptures to "the king of the north," and "the king of the south." These kings, the one on the north and the other on the south side of Palestine, were often mixed up with events in the Holy Land. Hence the Spirit of God has given us many interesting details of their past history in connexion with the Jews. (See Dan. xi.) And of the future He has written, verses 40, 41, "And at the time of the end shall the king of the south push at him: (at the wilful king—the antichrist—then reigning in the land:) and the king of the north shall come against him (the antichrist) like a whirlwind, and with chariots, and with horsemen, and with many ships; and he (the king of the north) shall enter into the countries, and shall overflow and pass over. He shall enter also into the glorious land, and many countries shall be overthrown." This takes place, observe, "*at the time of the end;* to which period, the scenes in the Canticles, now under thy meditation, chiefly refer. A little while ago and the comparison was drawn from Egypt, (chap. i. 9,) then from the wilderness, (chap. iii. 6,) and now from the land. Then shall the long, dark, and dreary night of Israel's dispersion be nearly over. The last and powerful king of the north comes to his end on "the glorious, holy mountain, and none shall help him." Antichrist and his confederates shall be finally overthrown; Israel fully restored; "And the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day." Thus far, as to outward events, we have the north and the south winds—the *trial* and the *blessing*.

No sooner has the loved and beautiful Shelomith invited her Lord to come into His garden, and partake of the refreshing fruits thereof, than He answers, "*I am come.*" He does not say, "I may, or I will," but "I am come." Already, while she is yet inviting Him, He is present. His heart is ever ready—waiting to attend on the cry of His beloved ones. Oh! happy spouse—oh! happy people, that are in such a case as this! To have the King of kings, and Lord of lords, waiting, ready to attend when they call. The fruits of the Spirit are always acceptable to Him. Rich and varied He now finds them, and greatly He is delighted with this banquet of love.

CHAPTER V.

VER. 1. "*I am come into my garden, my sister, my spouse: I have gathered my myrrh with my spice; I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey; I have drunk my wine with my milk; eat, O friends, drink, yea drink abundantly, O beloved.*" These different fruits may represent the different results of the Spirit's operations in souls by the truth. There may be tears, bitter as myrrh, flowing from one, under a deep sense of past failure. The Spirit of God having applied the truth in power to the conscience, the heart is broken. Its deep fountains are opened up, and bitterest tears of deepest anguish flow like a river. And now out comes, in unreserved confession before God, the whole matter.

Second causes are lost sight of, in the searching light of God's holy presence. "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight." These are close quarters for a soul to be in with God. Though David's sin had been against his neighbour, and against the well-being of society, yet he says, "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned." All sin is against God; and it is a painful thing to have to do with God about our sin. But right into the presence chamber of the Holy One we must go, just as we are, if we would get rid of the awful burden of sin. There, and there only, can we find full relief. The weeping penitent must lay down the multitude of his sins, side by side with the multitude of God's tender mercies. Only there can he learn what that word meaneth, "Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound." The Father meets His child, blessed be His name, in the boundless grace of His heart, on the ground of the precious blood of Jesus. As the rising wave from the fathomless ocean hastens to meet and embrace the descending stream, and overflow all its limits, so does grace meet the penitent sinner, and obliterate for ever all trace of his sin. Its course, like a river, may have been long and deep, but now its very course and limits are untraceable.

O LOVE divine, thou vast abyss!
My sins are swallowed up in thee;
Covered is my unrighteousness
From condemnation I am free;
While Jesu's blood, through earth and skies,
Mercy! free, boundless mercy! cries.

Having passed through the experience of psalm li., David could praise and worship God with a joyful heart

according to the strains of psalm ciii. "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits; *who forgiveth all thine iniquities;* who healeth all thy diseases; who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with loving-kindness and tender mercies." Thus God's majesty, holiness, and truth have been maintained, sin judged in the light, the conscience cleared, the heart made happy, full communion restored, and the soul established in grace. The tears may have been more bitter than myrrh, but the results are sweeter than honey, and more fragrant, to the heart of Christ, than all spices.

The Lord finds every variety of fruit, in the assemblies of His people. But with all that which is of the Spirit, He has the fullest fellowship and enjoyment. "*I have gathered . . . . I have eaten . . . . I have drunk.*" He partakes of all the variety. He slights none. In the advanced disciple He may find that which indicates the strength and vigour of wine; while in the newborn babe there may be the sweet simplicity of milk. An infidel, chafed and annoyed by the beautiful simplicity of a believing child, who was speaking about the joy and happiness of being with Jesus for ever, said to her, "But what if Jesus be in hell?" "Ah," replied the dear child, "but it would not be hell if He were there." How simple, yet how unanswerable! How honouring to the name—how refreshing to the heart of Jesus! What hast thou for thy Lord, O my soul? What can He gather from thee—what can He eat—what can He drink of thine? What is sweeter than humility?

What is more honouring to the Lord than entire dependence on Him? What more grateful to His heart than a daily, growing desire for the glory of God?

Many will partake of this royal supper, and enter into its joys. Many, very many, are the "friends" of the Bridegroom. And all, in the day of His glory, will enter into *His joy*. Wondrous, long-looked-for day of heavenly and earthly glory! All hearts will be reached and touched with that joyous invitation. "Eat, O friends, drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved." The "natural branches," long broken off from the stock of promise, shall, as the apostle says, be grafted in again. "In that day"—the day of Israel's restoration —"the Lord shall cause them that come of Jacob to take root; Israel shall blossom and bud, and fill the face of the world with fruit." (Isaiah xxvii.) What a feast shall then be provided through restored Israel, for all nations! *The face of the world shall be filled with fruit.* "And in that mountain shall the Lord of hosts make unto all people, a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined." (Isaiah xxv.) Again, "And it shall come to pass in that day, I will hear, saith the Lord, I will hear the heavens, and they shall hear the earth: and the earth shall hear the corn, and the wine, and the oil; and they shall hear Jezreel. And I will sow her unto me in the earth." (Hosea ii.) Here the figure is changed from *ingrafting* to *sowing*, as if God was going to do an entirely new thing in the earth.

'Now we know, from the New Testament,' says a recent writer, 'that in that day, "the heavens" will be occupied by Christ and His glorified saints. Jehovah

will hear the heavens, "and they shall hear the earth." Christ, in whom all things, both in heaven and earth, will then be gathered, will be the One to whom prayer shall be addressed from all on earth, even as it will be through Him, and His glorified saints, that blessing will be universally administered. "And the earth shall hear the corn, and the wine, and the oil." No want, no scarcity even then. The voice of complaining will have ceased to be heard in the streets. Creation's universal groan will have been hushed; yea, it will have given place to universal hymns of gratitude and praise. "And they shall hear Jezreel." Now Jezreel, as scholars tell us, means, "the seed of God;" and this interpretation of the word is confirmed by what immediately follows, "I will sow her (Israel) unto me in the earth" . . . . . There shall be one unbroken chain of blessing, from the throne of Jehovah, the great source of all, down to the enjoyment, by mankind, of all the blessings of this life: and the place in this wondrous chain filled by restored Israel, is that of Jezreel, the seed of God, sown by Jehovah, and to Him, in the earth, and filling the face of the world with fruit. Jehovah—the heavens, occupied by Christ and the Church in glory—the earth—restored Israel, or Jezreel, the seed of God—universal blessing on the earth, even to the abundance of corn, and wine, and oil, while war and violence are at an end; "And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together." Praise, eternal praise, to Him who alone doeth wondrous things! Let the whole earth be filled with His glory.'

Oh! what a circle of blessing is presented to us here! Mark it well, O my soul, and meditate thereon. Look

forward to the happy day, when He who has been long absent shall have returned, and shall say in the ears of His waiting people, "*I am come*"—"I am come into my garden, my sister, my spouse." Then shall the promises made to the fathers, be fulfilled to their children, according to the word of the Lord. Jehovah in the highest heavens—Christ and His glorified saints, in the heavens that are connected with the earth—then restored Israel in the holy land, and all nations of the earth, thus linked together in one glorious chain of universal blessing. Oh! what a circle of glory! What a circle of "friends!" What a feast of love! And what a joyous welcome from the heart of Him who is "*Lord of all!*" "Eat, O friends; drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved."

Ver. 2. "*I sleep, but my heart waketh: it is the voice of my beloved that knocketh, saying, Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled: for my head is filled with dew, and my locks with the drops of the night.*" In this sad confession of the Bride we have brought before us an aspect of experience, which many believers, Christian as well as Jewish, are frequently passing through, and which well deserves our patient meditation.

By far the greater proportion of Christians are more occupied with themselves, and their changeable feelings, than with the word of God. This is the fruitful source of endless troubles and perplexities to the soul. How often it happens in the history of some Christians that when they experience a change of feeling in themselves, they hastily conclude that Christ Himself is not now what He once was to them. They judge the Lord by

their own feelings, in place of believing in Him according to His own word. This is looking to self in place of Christ, and being governed by *feelings* in place of the unchangeable *truth* of God.

Only a few hours ago, as we may say, following the order of our song, the spouse was in the full joy of her Lord's presence. She was then bright and happy, like a certain class of Christians in the full current of a joyous meeting. But supper being ended, and the guests withdrawn, she retires to rest. Very soon, alas, a change comes over her *feelings* which greatly troubles her. "I sleep, but my heart waketh." She is restless, uncomfortable, unhappy. The *heart* is breathing after Christ, but she is indisposed to exert herself for Him. What a sad, melancholy state of things, when the blessed Jesus is knocking at the door! But this is no uncommon case. The believer may be in the main right at heart, but having fallen into a low, dull, sleepy state, spiritual duties become a burden, and they are either entirely neglected, or not done heartily. This is a miserable state of soul to be in, "I sleep, *but* my heart waketh." It is well to look at both sides of this "but." She is neither asleep nor awake. On the one side there is a slumbering conscience, on the other a wakeful heart. No quiet rest can she find—no refreshment. And well it is so when we become careless about the things of the Lord. But what a picture of thousands, and tens of thousands, who ought to be bright, happy, and always ready girded for anything in the way of service to Christ and immortal souls.

We now turn to the bright and blessed side of this instructive scene. Has the *Lord* changed because *she*

is changed? Blind unbelief would be sure to say He had; and then unworthy thoughts of Christ would follow, and no end to doubts and fears. When inward thoughts are guiding, the words of Christ go for nothing. But, really, has her coldness and indifference not changed Him in the least towards her? The love of Christ towards His spouse, never for one moment changes, notwithstanding her backsliding and inconstancy. But no better answer could be given to the question, than the words of the sleepy spouse herself. Drowsy as she is, she knows His knock, and discerns the voice to be His; and still she says "*my beloved.*" There is a life in her soul which must ever respond to that voice, in spite of failure. "It is the voice of *my beloved*," she says, "that knocketh, saying, Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled: for my head is filled with dew, and my locks with the drops of the night." Now thou hast, O my soul, the poor changeable believer, and the unchangeable Saviour before thee, face to face, on the page of eternal truth. What thinkest thou? Are the vain suggestions of the human mind, in such a case, to be the guide, as to the mind of Christ, or the plain word of God? What could be plainer or more to the point than the word before us? Mark it well, O my soul, and meditate thereon. And may its blessed light ever be reflected, from thy heart and conscience, in all thy intercourse with backsliding and troubled souls.

Full of the most patient, touching love, are the words of the Bridegroom to His weak and erring Bride. In place of being influenced by her sad state of soul, and accusing her of ingratitude and indifference towards

Himself, He appeals to her in terms more tender than on any former occasion. "Open to *me*," He says, "to *me*"—thine own Messiah—thy Beloved—I am Jesus—why shut the door against me?" "Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled." Never before had He called her His "undefiled." This term of wondrous grace and significancy was reserved for the day of her deep failure. And never before had He alluded to the heavy "dews," and the heavier "drops" of the night, by which He had been overtaken, in His path of devoted, unselfish love for her. Oh! what an appeal! Its deep, deep tones re-echo from the darkness of Gethsemane, and from the solitudes of Calvary, the greatness of a love which nothing could turn aside from its purpose. But, alas, His appeal has but little effect on her sleep-laden conscience.

Is there anything in all this, let me now ask, that looks like a *change* in the love of Christ towards His backsliding one? Who can say there is? unless it be, that He now reveals His love more fully, and appeals to her more tenderly. Does He not plead with her in a way that is fit to melt the heart in listening to Him? He pleads as if it would be a great favour to Him, to be admitted under her roof? Or, like a weary traveller who has lost His way in a dark and stormy night, He pleads for shelter. It is also worthy of special note, that never before, at any one time, had He addressed her in so many terms of endearment. "Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled." Such, O my soul, is the love of Christ—the love of Christ to a wandering one. Consider it well. There is but one heart that never changes. Oh! how we should value

that heart—trust in that heart—count only on that heart—and always keep near to that changeless heart of perfect love. But, oh! alas, what hearts are ours. All this patient, wondrous love, is met by the slumbering spouse with great indifference, and answered with the most trifling and frivolous excuses.

Ver. 3. "*I have put off my coat; how shall I put it on? I have washed my feet; how shall I defile them?*" Alas, alas, for the daughter of Zion! How insensible, through failure, to the claims of her own Messiah—her gracious Lord. What a hardening, deadening thing is sin! "It is an evil thing and bitter, that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God." Once away from the presence of the Lord, and who can tell how far we may depart from Him, or into how many by-ways we may wander. The thought of such a course is fearful to contemplate. And the more we love our brethren, and the more spiritual our perception is, of this dreadful evil, the greater will be our sorrow over a backsliding soul. Who that has a care for souls and the Lord's glory, has not wept in secret over the too manifestly decaying zeal, and dying energy of a once earnest, fervent spirit? The pastor's heart once so cheered, so thankful, so hopeful, so delighted, to see such freshness of soul for Jesus! Early at all the meetings—the countenance beaming—the spirit joyous—every word about Christ dropping into the soul like the oil of gladness; and only retiring from the public meeting to meditate on some fresh truth, and enjoy deeper communion with the Lord in secret.

Those who have felt the sorrow of such a bright soul

being led astray, know what it is. As the green, fresh leaf of summer, after a severe blight, looks withered and drooping—seared as if a hot iron had passed over it; so, alas, does the soul that has been led away by some subtle snare of the enemy. Everything in appearance and manner changes. Oh, how changed! Irregularity in attendance soon follows. Every one, he imagines, is changed towards him; slow to learn the change is in himself. He takes offence at some little thing, it may be, and leaves. Now his seat is empty—he is gone—whither? The Lord only, in most cases, can answer this question. Not that *we* should be indifferent to the question; but the Lord only can trace the steps of his wanderings. His sleepless eye follows him everywhere; and the heart that was once pierced for his sins can never, never, no never, cease to care for him. In the wisdom of His love, He may allow the failing one to taste the bitterness and sorrow of his self-chosen ways; thus it will be with Israel by and by; but the Lord has always within His reach the means of bringing to repentance, and of the soul's full restoration to Himself.

Ver. 4. "*My beloved put in his hand by the hole of the door, and my bowels were moved for him.*" This is a movement in the right direction. The Lord be praised! His own hand has done it. Now we have something like an answer to His love. Feeble it is, but real. The heart is moved for Him. She has never ceased to call Him, "my beloved." There is affection for the Lord, though failure. But when the gentle, gracious knockings of a Saviour's love are unheeded, He employs

other means. He knows the state of the heart, and what will effectually move it towards Himself. "Shall not God search this out; for he knoweth the secrets of the heart." (Psalm xliv. 21.) Sometimes by means the most unexpected He reaches the conscience. The light coming in discovers where we are and what we are. Grace triumphs. The soul now seeks the presence of the Lord, and the happiness that is to be found alone in Him. Still, it may be some time before it fully recovers from its failure. There may be much sorrow, humbling, breaking down, before the perfect repose of His presence be found. Confused and agitated, like one just awakened out of sleep, we may run and seek the Lord where He never said He would be found. The sanctuary, not the city, is the place of His blessed and joy-giving presence.

Ver. 5. "*I rose to open to my beloved; and my hands dropped with myrrh, and my fingers with sweet-smelling myrrh, upon the handles of the lock.*" Is there such a thing as *sweet* tears as well as *bitter*? And can both flow, mingled down at the same time? What more bitter to the taste than myrrh? What more fragrant to the smell than sweet-smelling myrrh? "My hands dropped with myrrh, and my fingers with sweet-smelling myrrh, upon the handles of the lock." (Myrrh, signifies *flowing, weeping.)* Distinct now and real is the response of the Bride to the persevering love of her Bridegroom. "I rose to open to my beloved." She is recovering from her spiritual indolence. The sense of her sin in not opening the door when He knocked, is bitterness in her soul; yet it is mingled

with great affection for the one she slighted. Reaching the door at which He stood so long, she finds the scene filled with the fragrance of His Person. Laying hold on the handles of the lock, "her hands dropped with myrrh, and her fingers with sweet-smelling myrrh."*

Now that she is awakened, and alive to what she has been, and to what she has done, deepest sorrow and bitterest regret, mingled with the most adoring love for her good and gracious Lord, fill and overflow her soul, like one who has ventured back, after sorrowful failure, to the scenes of former spiritual enjoyment. The well-known entrance, the sight of many faces so familiar, the sound of a voice not forgotten, and which has still an echo in the now melting heart—fill the soul with deepest emotions. The whole scene recalls to the mind many by-gone days of truest happiness. And now, mingled with the yielding up of the heart to the love of Jesus, are the smitings of an upbraiding conscience. The heart in silence breathes, "Lord Jesus, I am ashamed, and blush before thee. Miserable and unhappy have I been every hour of my wanderings. Oh! how ungrateful! how ungrateful have I been! Oh! that I should have brought this stain on thy blessed name! My soul is bitter with self-reproach. Lord, can I be forgiven? But oh! deepen in my soul the

* History informs us of an Eastern custom which throws light on the comparison here used. When the loved one persists in refusing the addresses of her lover, he visits her father's house, or where she lives, during the night. Around the door of the house he hangs garlands of flowers and strews the threshold with sweet flowers. He also anoints with fragrant unguents the locks and handles of the door. By this means he avows to the whole family that his affection, though slighted, is real.

sense of my sin in going astray, and of thy holiness and grace, in bringing me back to thy fold. Restore unto me the joys of thy salvation. My soul cleaveth unto thee."

> Blessed Redeemer! I acknowledge now
> How wise, and firm, and suitable thy ways
> Of mercy and of judgment—each in turn—
> Bright, and more bright thy loving kindness shines,
> Dark, and more dark my own depravity.
> By love's most strong constraint with hands that drop
> Sweet smelling odours by thyself bestowed.
> No longer in responseless apathy
> I hear thee knock: but now obedient made.

Ver. 6. "*I opened to my beloved; but my beloved had withdrawn himself, and was gone; my soul failed when he spake; I sought him, but I could not find him; I called him, but he gave me no answer.*" Like Joseph of old, who sought, in many ways, to exercise the hearts of his brethren, because of their guilt concerning himself: so the true Joseph will deeply exercise the hearts of His brethren, the Jews, in the latter day, because of their condition before God. But Joseph did not love his brethren the less, because he allowed them to pass through a trying, sifting process. His heart was full and ready to burst forth in expressions of strongest affection when the right moment came. What a relief to him when the flood-gates were thrown open, and when the long pent-up love of his heart had a free course. So shall it be with the Lord and Israel, just before He reveals Himself in power and glory, for their complete deliverance, and the full manifestation of His love as their own Messiah.

The point of analogy, however, which is here so striking between Joseph and his brethren, and Christ and the Jews, completely fails when applied to Israel and the Church of God. The common notion, that Christ sometimes *withdraws Himself*, or *hides His face* from Christians in order that He may try them and prove them, has no foundation in the Epistles. With the Jew, of course, under law, everything was different; God dwelt in the thick darkness—the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest—the perfect sacrifice had not been offered—the conscience of the Jew had not been perfectly purged, therefore he could not have full peace. But with Christians, the position of things is entirely changed. "The darkness is past, and the true light now shineth." We are "accepted in the beloved." Our sins, according to the judgment of God, were all, and for ever, put away by the *one offering* of Christ. When God's full judgment against sin was expressed on the cross, the veil was rent, and the way into the holiest of all was laid open. We, dead *in* sin; and Christ, dead *for* sin, were quickened together, raised up together, and seated together in heavenly places; God having forgiven all our trespasses. There can be no veil between God and Christ in glory, and we being *in Christ*, all perfect before the face of God, there can be no veil between God and us. And, moreover, the *Holy Ghost* has come down as the *witness* and *power* of our present *oneness* with the risen and exalted Christ, and to give us, by His indwelling, the conscious enjoyment of our place and portion with Christ, in the presence of God. The very thought of the Lord hiding His face from those who are in the full light of God

with Himself, and *as Himself*, is surely utterly foreign to the whole doctrine of Scripture, about the Church. True—alas, how true—we may forget how richly we are blessed in Christ Jesus—we may forget that we are associated with Him as risen from the dead, and gone up on high—we may forget that His life is ours, and that His delights should be ours also; and forgetting these things, we may get away from Him, and sin against Him. And no sin, let us remember, can be so hateful to God, as the sin of Christians; and that, just because we are brought so near to Himself. But, alas, we must be away from Him when we fall into sin; none of us could sin in His presence. *There*, it is hateful to us, and we have power over it.

So dignified is the manner of the Holy Ghost, when referring to this subject, that He barely admits the possibility of the Christian sinning. "*If*," He says, only the possibility of such a thing is supposed. "*If* any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And he is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only; but also for the whole world." (1 John ii. 1, 2.) Here we have divine provision for all the need of our pilgrim path. The advocacy of Christ, founded on righteousness and propitiation, secures the cleansing away of our defilements and maintains us spotless before the face of God. How opposed to this blessed truth is the common notion, that God sometimes hides His face behind a cloud, in order to test the faith and love of His children! We may fail to enjoy this blessed truth, or we may be ignorant of it, but the truth of God remains unchangeably the same; and the position of the Church before

Him in Christ, is as unchangeable as the truth that reveals it.

Now, if we turn from the Church to Israel as such, we find not *analogy*, but the *contrast* to all this wondrous grace. For although, "at the time of the end," the remnant are looking for the Messiah and longing for Him with true affection, they are still under law, and allowed to feel its pressure. Like the manslayer of old, they will be, as it were, in the city of refuge until a change in the priesthood takes place. (See Num. xxxv.) The appearing of the Lord's anointed, in the exercise of His Melchisedec priesthood, will be the great antitype of that ancient law. A change in the priesthood, *through death*, brought liberty to those who were prisoners in the cities of refuge. "But after the death of the high priest the slayer shall return into the land of his possession." Israel, in the latter day, before the Lord appears, will pass through a deep, sifting work under law, as many scriptures clearly show. The solemn judgment of God against their sin of blood-guiltiness must be felt and owned in the conscience. And *when* He appears, this blessed, though severe, work will be deepened, but then it will be under grace. The following passage refers to this point: "And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of *grace* and of supplications; and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn." Read carefully Zech. xii., also xiii. and xiv.

But is it not truly beautiful, O my soul, to see the

reality and fervour of affection, which the blessed Lord has created in the hearts of His people, even amidst all their sufferings? How sweetly the heart of the spouse breathes after her well-beloved! Indeed, this is the character of the Canticles. The Psalms give us more of the workings of conscience in the remnant, the Canticles, pre-eminently, the affections of the heart. This is the side which we have here, and a blessed side it is. Here we have the Bridegroom-love of Jesus manifested, and its sweet and touching reflection in the heart of His loving spouse. "My soul failed when he spake." She could hear Him, but could not see Him, and her heart fainted within her; she had slighted Him in an evil hour, and being still on the ground of righteousness, He had withdrawn Himself, and was gone. But He loved her not the less, because He did this. And if *she* felt keenly the hiding of His face, *He* felt it infinitely more. Never did the heart of Joseph burn with such an intense flame of love to his brethren, as when he was concealing himself from them. But a greater than Joseph is here! "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever." And mark, it does not read —*God* is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever; of course He is that; but it is of "Jesus Christ," *Saviour and Bridegroom*, that the passage affirms, He never changes. Learn then, O my soul, to confide in Him. Never doubt His love, whatever appearances may be, or distrust His grace; grace can never, never fail.

The scene which follows is a painful one. She is out of communion, and all is in confusion. The very energy and ardour of her love, bring her into all sorts of trouble. She exposes herself, as it were, to the taunts of pro-

fessors *inside*, and to the rough treatment of the world *outside*. Everything for the moment is out of place as to her ways, but her heart is right in the main, and true to her Lord. "I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if ye find *my beloved*, that ye tell him, *I am sick of love*." Oh! how few of us could say, "I am sick of love." How seldom we expose ourselves to persecution through the fervour of our affections! May we know more of the communion which causeth the heart to burn, and the words to flow in living testimony for our absent Lord!

To those who know the Lord I speak,
Is my Beloved near?
The Bridegroom of my soul I seek,
Oh! when will He appear?

Ver. 9. "*What is thy beloved more than another beloved, O thou fairest among women? what is thy beloved more than another beloved, that thou dost so charge us?*" What more grateful to the heart than to know that we are *fairer* than all others to the one we love best? To be well assured that this is His mind, gives sweet contentment to the soul. It is also very pleasant to hear that others, who might have been filled with jealousy, speak of us, and to us, just like Himself. Nothing beyond this can be desired.

Well, so shall it be ere long with the daughter of Zion—the fair spouse of the true King Solomon. When brought into full blessing under the Messiah, and highly honoured by Him, all then will gladly address her, "O thou fairest among women." The "daughters of Jerusalem" may represent in this scene the cities of Judah,

which will have a subordinate place to Jerusalem, in the day of her coming glory; though, still in the same circle of blessing. Jerusalem and the Jews will then have the chief place of honour and glory in the earth; and all nations shall then court their favour, and seek the shelter of their wing. "Thus saith the Lord of hosts; in those days it shall come to pass, that ten men shall take hold, out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you; for we have heard that God is with you." (Zech. viii. 23.) Clearly, this is still future. But further, the spirit of prophecy, speaking of the restoration of the children of Zion, says, "And kings shall be thy nursing fathers, and their queens thy nursing mothers: they shall bow down to thee with their face towards the earth, and lick up the dust of thy feet: and thou shalt know that I am the Lord: for they shall not be ashamed that wait for me." Isaiah xlix. 23.

What a change for the Jew when this takes place! What a blessed change for that long down-trodden people! What a history is theirs! at least if we embrace the past, present, and future. "Go, ye swift messengers," says the prophet, "to a nation scattered and peeled, to a people terrible from their beginning hitherto, a nation meted out and trodden down, whose land the rivers have spoiled." But now, all is happily changed. Under the figure of a Bride, loved, admired, and delighted in, the remnant of Judah is spoken of. The blessed Lord Himself—the spared remnant of the other tribes—and all the Gentiles, admire her peerless beauty. "O thou fairest among women." Thus shall it be in that day, with the entire nation—the ten tribes and the

two. They shall all be gathered to their own land, and each tribe to its own lot.

In answer to the enquiry of the daughters of Jerusalem, "What is thy beloved more than another beloved, that thou dost so charge us?" she immediately replies, and gives a full length portrait of her well-beloved. And there is all that sharpness in the outline, and minuteness in the detail, which strong and mingled passion alone could give. Her strong affection is made doubly strong through self-reproach. Her recollection of Him is vivified through having slighted Him; and all her feelings are intensified through not finding Him. In this state of mind she portrays Him to the daughters of Jerusalem from head to foot. Oh! to be ready—always ready, on the spur of the moment, to speak of Jesus! She needed no time for pre-meditation. She asks for none. Delighted with the opportunity, all she wanted was the listening ear, and the believing heart. Like the woman at the well of Sychar, her own heart was overflowing. Her love had grown, through disappointment, into a passion. It is relief to her heart to speak of Him. She could not help being eloquent. Love is the best gift of the evangelist—love to the Saviour—love to the sinner. But when that love rises into a passion, there must be true, burning eloquence. Never, never, O my soul, be content with less than this. Love to the Saviour—love for souls, is good, but the evangelist needs more. Seek that thy love may rise into a fervent flame. The work demands it. Art thou an evangelist? Let everything that would hinder thy work be consumed on the altar of entire consecration. Preaching is not teaching remember, neither is teaching

preaching. Appeal to souls, plead with them, lay hold on them, agonize for them. It is a matter of life or death—of ineffable, eternal blessedness; or unutterable, eternal woe. Realize the future in the present, and raise a cry to the God of all grace, that not one soul may go away unimpressed, unblessed, unsaved.

More temperate hearts, and wiser too, it may be, in many things, may say, "There is much of nature in such zeal, and not a little unbelief; remember the work is the Lord's." Fully admit thine own failure, and that the work is God's from first to last; but let nothing slacken thy zeal, or damp thy energy. May the flame of thy love be unquenchable. Oh! be in earnest; heaven is in earnest, hell is in earnest, and be thou in deep, deep earnest. The Master wept over a city, thou hast a world to weep over. Love with *His* love, and let *His* tears flow through *thine* eyes.

Oh! speak of Jesus—of that love
Passing all bounds of human thought,
Which made Him quit His throne above,
With God-like deep compassion fraught,
To save from death our ruined race,
Our guilt to purge, our path to trace.

Oh! speak of Jesus—of His death,
For sinners such as me He died.
"'Tis finished," with His latest breath,
The Lord, Jehovah Jesus, cried.
That death of shame and agony
Opened the way of life to me.

Ver. 10. "*My beloved is white and ruddy; the chiefest among ten thousand.*" It is said of David that he was "ruddy, and of a fair countenance," referring no doubt, to his youthful bloom and beauty. But

in the description here given of the True David, the spotless purity of His Person, and the character of His sacrifice, may be referred to by the Spirit of prophecy. These are significant words—"white and ruddy." The Holy Spirit delights to set forth, whether in type or allegory, the glories of His Person, and the infinite value of His blood. "Can you tell me of anything that is whiter than snow?" enquired one, who was addressing a Sunday school. "The soul that has been washed in the blood of Jesus," was the satisfactory answer of a little girl. But, oh, if a brand plucked from the fire, blackened and consumed, as it were, by sin, can thus be made whiter than snow—pure as the light of heaven, in virtue of that most precious blood; what, we may ask, must be the essential holiness, and infinite dignity of Him, by whose blood-shedding this marvellous work is accomplished! Yes, indeed, one soul thus blest would prove the wondrous efficacy of the Sacrifice; but what wilt thou say, my soul, when in heaven thou beholdest myriads upon myriads of ransomed souls, singing the song that is ever new, "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood; and hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen." Oh! what exalted, adoring thoughts we shall then have of the once lowly Son of Man, but now highly exalted Christ of God!

What thou shalt then see with thine eyes, my soul, thou art now to believe with thine heart. O meditate upon it, and glory in the truth, "My beloved is white and ruddy; the chiefest among ten thousand." What so "white"—so clean—so holy, as the blessed Person of

the Son of Man—Jehovah—Jesus—the root and the offspring of David? What so "ruddy" as the blood that flowed from His immaculate veins on Calvary? Who, O who, is worthy to be the Chieftain of all God's hosts, save the Captain of our salvation?

> "Oh! chiefest of ten thousand, who like thee,
> Who, Lord, among the mighty may compare
> With thee the standard-bearer of the host."

Thus to know Jesus is *present salvation, peace, and happiness.* To know that my sins are blotted out by these "ruddy" drops—yes, blotted out, I say blotted out for ever, is perfect blessedness. They have no existence now before God, the Judge of sin. Pardoned I am—I know I am, God says it. But to know that thy sins are *blotted out* is a deeper thought still. Christ *abolished* sin by the sacrifice of Himself. Like the pebble that has been cast into the depths of the sea, our sins are *untraceable*—they are buried in the deep waters of God's forgetfulness. And God has been so glorified in the work of His blessed Son, that it is now a righteous thing with God, as well as gracious, to bless all who believe in Jesus. He can now *indulge* His love by meeting in grace the chief of sinners, who bows to the name of the once lowly, but now exalted Son of Man.

Ver. 11. "*His head is as the most fine gold; his locks are bushy and black as a raven.*" Having answered the daughters of Jerusalem in a general way as to her Beloved, she now begins to describe Him more minutely. Guided by the Spirit of God, she delights to dwell on His varied excellencies and glories, under the similitude

of the human features. One word, my soul, at the threshold; seek not, I pray thee, for the mystic meaning of these separate features, beyond the limits of holy scripture. "The place whereon thou standest is holy ground." For although the Lord did not forbid Moses to draw near to the burning bush, He told him, plainly, that it must be with unshod feet. Let thine eye then be anointed, and thy heart worshipping, while meditating on Zion's glorious King.

In the fourth chapter, the Bridegroom, in recounting the attractions of His Bride, enumerates *seven* features. Here, she points out *ten* in portraying her Beloved. The significant numbers *three* and *seven*, are united in Him. We will now briefly meditate on each feature separately.

"*His head is as the most fine gold.*" *Supreme majesty* may be indicated by "the most fine gold," as in Dan. ii. 38, "Thou art this head of gold." It is also frequently used in scripture, to represent *divine righteousness* in connection with the Person of Christ; as in Isaiah xi. 5, and Revelation i. 13. Of this same Jesus we read, "Behold a king shall reign in righteousness, and princes shall rule in judgment. And a man shall be as an hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place; as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land." Isaiah xxxii. 1, 2.

"*His locks are bushy and black as a raven.*" The bushy, raven locks of the Bridegroom are evidently contrasted with the long, flowing hair of the Bride, which he compares to "a flock of goats, that appear from Mount Gilead." Youthful vigour and strength may

also be indicated by the profusion of the locks. Of Ephraim it is said, Hosea vii. 9, "Strangers have devoured his strength, and he knoweth it not; yea, grey hairs are here and there upon him, yet he knoweth it not." But of Ephraim's Lord and King no signs of decay shall ever be seen. He is the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever. Some believe, that "the most fine gold" refers to the Godhead of Jesus; and the "bushy locks" to His manhood. No truth lies nearer the heart of faith, than the perfect manhood of the blessed Saviour; and that in connexion with His eternal Godhead. "Christ who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen." Rom. ix. 5; Col. i. 15—19.

> "Admire, adore this God immutable;
> To whom alone it appertains to say,
> 'I LIVE FOR EVER!' and to whose vast mind,
> The shadow of a turning is unknown."

Ver. 12. "*His eyes are as the eyes of doves by the rivers of waters, washed with milk, and fitly set.*" Margin, *setting in fulness.* In Revelation v. 6, St. John speaks of "the Lamb which he sees in the midst of the throne, having "seven eyes which are the seven spirits of God sent forth into all the earth." The number *seven*, we know, denotes fulness, perfection, which here signifies *intelligence.* "For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of those whose heart is perfect toward him." (2 Chron. xvi. 9.) But the believer has nothing to fear from the keen, penetrating glance of that eye of sevenfold brightness; to him it is soft, tender, and affectionate "as the eyes of doves by the rivers of

waters." It is his happy privilege to *watch its direction.* "I will guide thee with mine eye." What feature so expressive as the eye! And, oh! what an eye is now before the eye of faith! Tender as the dove's—bright and lustrous as when bathed in the river; or shining, as with a passing tear of deep compassion. The white part, pure as milk, the eye itself, "fitly set." Neither too prominent nor too much sunk, but like the precious stone that is perfectly set in the foil of the ring.

Ver. 13. "*His cheeks are as a bed of spices, as sweet flowers.*" Margin, *towers of perfume;* or, as some render it, "mounds of balsams." Great sweetness, bloom, beauty, and fragrance, are represented by these comparisons. The face in general may be referred to by this feature. Only think of the difference between the past day of lowly grace with Jesus, and the coming day of wondrous glory. The daughter of Zion, in her blindness, despised and rejected Him *because* of His lowliness; and in perfect grace He submitted to the will of man, which is enmity against God. "I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair; I hid not my face from shame and spitting." (Isaiah i. 6.) And, again, "They shall smite the judge of Israel with a rod upon the cheek." (Micah v. 1.) But for all this hatred and cruelty, the daughter of Zion will be heartily sorry then. The veil shall be removed. As it dropped from the face of Moses when he turned round to the tabernacle, so shall it drop from the heart of Israel when they look on Him whom they pierced. And then, in place of their saying of Him, "There is

no beauty that we should desire him," it will be, "He is altogether lovely." The once marred, insulted, and smitten cheek, is to the heart of the nation as *beds of spices—sweet flowers—towers of perfume—mounds of balsams.* Oh! what has grace wrought? What the operations of the Spirit? What the triumph of God's pardoning love? Hasten! O, hasten, the coming—happy—millennial day!

"*His lips like lilies, dropping sweet-smelling myrrh.*" The comparison may be to the beautiful red lily of the East; but the believer knows the truth of that blessed word, "Grace is poured into thy lips," not *dropped* scantily, but *poured* abundantly. The lips of Jesus, and His only, can speak peace to a troubled soul. Until He, and He alone, is listened to, true peace is unknown. "The Lord God," He says by the prophet, "hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary."

> "Sweet-smelling myrrh of Jesu's holy lips,
> Diffusing comfort, purity, and peace,
> Where'er it penetrates—oh! waft it soon,
> God! high and holy! to remotest lands;
> Prepare remotest hearts to welcome it!
> Yes! thou hast promised—and what arm of flesh
> Shall interpose to hinder or obstruct
> What in thine everlasting purposes is sure?"

Ver. 14. "*His hands are as gold rings set with the beryl.*" In general, all the works of His hands may be embraced in this feature. Works of nature, providence, and grace. Their beauty, glory, perfection, and durability, may be represented by the gold, the ring, and the precious stones. "The works of his hands are verity

and judgment; all his commandments are sure. They stand fast for ever and ever, and are done in truth and uprightness." (Psalm cxi. 7, 8.) But *faith* can *now* say of these jewelled hands, in the language of the loved Shulamite, "His left hand is under my head, and his right hand doth embrace me." Oh! what an embrace! Happy, thrice happy, they who are thus folded in His everlasting arms! It is everlasting—endless, like the ring itself. "Love never faileth."

"*His belly is as bright ivory overlaid with sapphires.*" The *bowels* of His deep and tender compassion may be referred to here. "My heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of my bowels." (Psalm xxii. 14.) The idea of *depth* may be conveyed by a reference to the bowels. And the colour of the sapphire stone being blue, suggests the *heavenly* character of His tender sympathies. "And there was under his feet as it were a paved work of a sapphire stone, and as it were the body of heaven in his clearness." (Ex. xxiv. 10.) Pure as the "*bright ivory*," deep as the bowels—high as heaven, is the tenderness, pity, compassion, and love of our blessed Lord Jesus Christ. "If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies, fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind." Phil. ii. 1, 2.

Ver. 15. "*His legs are as pillars of marble set in sockets of fine gold.*" The *walk*, in general, is usually represented by this feature. "Shew me thy ways, O Lord, teach me thy paths . . . . . All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth." (Psalm xxv.) By the

"pillars of marble," the strength, steadfastness, and continuance of His reign may be set forth; and by the "sockets of fine gold," *divine righteousness* as characterizing the whole of His governmental ways. Divine righteousness—almighty power—ways of "mercy and truth," appertain to Zion's—to earth's, mighty King. "The government shall be upon his shoulders." "But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever; a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom. Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows." (Heb. i. 8, 9.) "And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever." Daniel ii. 44.

"*His countenance is as Lebanon, excellent as the cedars.*" The spouse having already portrayed her Beloved from head to foot, she now refers, we doubt not, to His *general appearance*—to all His glorious features *together*—His *full stature.* And His stature "is as Lebanon, excellent as the cedars." This figure, evidently, illustrates His *glorious Majesty* as the Messiah. The lofty cedars "on that goodly mountain Lebanon," are the standing type in scripture of exaltation, glory, and majesty. Resplendent as the "most fine gold" from head to foot—adorned with every grace —fragrant with all sweetness—glorious and majestic like the cedars of Lebanon, is the *Person* of her well-beloved.

O Majestic King!
Thy front sublime, thy perfect character
Is as the noble mount of Lebanon.
Clothed in magnificent solemnity;
Thy spouse adores thy peerless excellence—
Thy towering glories.....

Ver. 16. "*His mouth is most sweet.*" The "lips" having been already referred to, something different from *words* may be indicated by this feature. It seems to refer more especially to the *grace* of Jesus—to the expressions of His kindness, His communications, His friendships. The spouse has often tasted of His grace, therefore she could say from experience, "His mouth is most sweet." The grace and kindness with which He meets her, even after failure, is enough to impress her heart for ever with the *sweetness* of the grace of her Lord. "If so be," says the apostle, "ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious." Some think that the *melody of His voice* is alluded to. But she goes on to say,

"*Yea, he is altogether lovely. This is my beloved and this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem.*" Language fails her. She is not wearied speaking of Him, but she is unable to say all that He is. Hence she closes the description with, "*He is altogether lovely.*" As if she had said, "All loveliness dwells in Him—all that is desirable is found in Him, and every unspecified beauty belongs to Him. In Him dwells all the *fulness* of the Godhead and all the *graces* of manhood. He is lovely in His humiliation, lovely in His exaltation, "*yea, he is altogether lovely.*"

But, oh! is not the last note of this lovely song, the richest and sweetest of all? "*My beloved . . . . . my friend.*" Some may say, "what a *description* this is!"

But say thou, O my soul, what a *conclusion* this is! "This is *my beloved* . . . . . *my friend.*" He Himself is mine. She is delighted to dwell on His qualities, but more delighted still to be able to say, "He in whom all these qualities shine so brightly is *mine!* Therefore all His qualities, too, are mine." But the qualities are in the *Person.* Thrones, crowns, sceptres, kingdoms, glories, blessedness are His, and the believer's in Him; but, after all, these are not Himself. What would all these things avail without the Person of the Beloved? To the renewed affections, blessed as they are, a mockery. Like the heart of the fair bride that has been made desolate—that has been wrecked on the very threshold of her new home, through the affections of the one she counted on going out after another. True, the well-furnished house remains, but, alas! it is evident that his heart, all she cared for, is elsewhere. She sees it; and all is turned into the gall and wormwood of bitterest disappointment. The shadow of a dark cloud spreads over the whole scene. Everything now bears the reflection of her own misery. Her happiness is gone. Yes, my soul, this is no uncommon thing with the loves of earth. Many a warm and confiding heart has thus been crushed and broken through the heartlessness of the one she trusted. But not so, never so, the loves of heaven. Blessed are all they that put their trust in Jesus. It is heaven on earth to know Him—to know His love—His unchanging love. His love is not in word only, but in deed and in truth. Not in a formal, heartless vow, but in the eternal covenant of His grace, and sealed with His own most precious blood.

CHAPTER VI.

VER. 1. "*Whither is thy beloved gone, O thou fairest among women? Whither is thy beloved turned aside? that we may seek him with thee.*" Most blessed and varied are the results which flow from the soul's entire occupation with Christ. To lose sight of self, and have Him for our one object, is immediate—certain blessing. When Christians slip into a low, dull state of soul, what will most speedily and effectually bring them out of it? Becoming filled and occupied with Christ for themselves, and speaking of Him to others. The experience of the spouse is a beautiful illustration of this truth. Her failure, doubtless, was thinking and caring about herself. Self-occupation—self-indulgence. "I have put off my coat; how shall I put it on? I have washed my feet; how shall I defile them?" But when challenged by the daughters of Jerusalem, as to the superiority of her Beloved over others, she is led to think and speak of Him only; and as she proceeds, her own soul, in the first place, is fully and happily restored. She is thus raised to a measure of communion, which she had never before reached; and she so dwells on the matchless excellencies of her Lord, that the enquiring daughters are attracted by the glories of His Person, and desire to see Him, and know Him.

But there is another fruit, my soul, of the Bride's testimony to Christ, which I would not have thee to pass over unnoticed. The daughters of Jerusalem, observe, very naturally conclude, that it must have been the

Bridegroom that left His Bride; not, of course, the Bride that had left her Bridegroom. Hearing her speak of Him in such glowing terms, they could not for a moment imagine that she could ever wander from Him. One so loved—so admired—so good—so appreciated, of course her eye could never cease to gaze on Him—her heart could never cease to delight in Him, and she could never, never grow weary of Him. Hence they enquire, "Whither is thy beloved gone? . . . . . whither is thy beloved turned aside? that we may seek him with thee." What a sharp, cutting reproof, though indirect! And how keenly her now sensitive heart must have felt it. But in extolling her Lord, she condemned herself. So it is, and so it must always be. When the soul is out of communion, everything seems to knock unkindly against it, and condemn its ways. But when restored, all these things serve to deepen our humility, and elevate the tone of our communion. The heart that has just been overflowing with the praises of her Beloved, is now rejoicing in Him. Her eye rests on Him. She knows where He is and what He is doing. Happy moment! All is light and joy. Now *she* can tell her companions where He is to be found.

Ver. 2. "*My beloved is gone down into his garden, to the beds of spices, to feed in the gardens, and to gather lilies.*" What a lovely scene this is to the eye of Shelomith, compared with chapter v. 7. "The watchmen that went about the city found me, they smote me, they wounded me: the keepers of the walls took away my veil from me." Such is the difference between walking

in fellowship with Jesus, and wandering in the world. Now she is in the rural scenes with her Beloved, entering into the counsels of His heart, and the works of His hands. This verse presents a scene of happy communion. The Lord is finding delight in His people; He is in His garden gathering lilies. "As the lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters." She enters into His thoughts about His people generally, and about herself especially. This is communion, blessed, solid communion. Her eye is single, and the light of heaven fills her soul. Now she exclaims,

Ver. 3. "*I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine; he feedeth among the lilies.*" This is a high note, but easily taken by faith. It is the key note of a soul that has lost sight of self. "I am my beloved's." It is the very opposite of a soul being occupied with itself. It is true heart-occupation with Christ. It is entering into His thoughts, His love, His grace, His delights; in place of being filled and occupied with its own thoughts, its own feelings, its own faith, or its own services. The eye, the heart, the thoughts, the lips, all are full of Christ and occupied with Him. "I am my beloved's." In chapter ii. 16, she says, "My beloved is mine and I am His." There, it is the joy of *possessing* Christ; *He is mine.* Here it is the deeper joy of *belonging to* Christ; *I am His.* Both are blessed, but the latter marks divine progress.

We can understand a newly-awakened soul being full of anxieties about itself, in many ways; and, when it first receives the truth, exclaiming, "I do believe in Jesus now—I am sure I believe in Him—I know I

believe in Him—I know He died for me on the cross—He shed His blood to wash my sins away, and now I can trust in Him!" Having watched the deep struggles of a newly-quickened soul emerging from the darkness of nature, and hearing the shout of victory, as the dark clouds were rolled back, "Jesus is mine!" we have been thankful and joyful beyond measure. It is all we could expect at the time, and we were satisfied.

But, by and by, when the soul has calmed and settled down after the throes of the new birth, we look for it to rise in the intelligence of truth from its own concerns to the *source* of its blessing. Where has this new life come from? it may well enquire. Whence its source? Why all this grace and goodness to me a sinner? Who has planted the pulse of eternal life in my once-dead soul? Learning, by degrees, that eternal life and every blessing are but the *fruits* of God's love in Christ to me a sinner, I am sweetly drawn to Him in the confidence of love—of His perfect love to me when in my sins. All fear departs; for fear hath torment. "God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son." "Verily, verily, I say unto you, the hour is coming, and now is, *when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear shall live.*" (John v. 25.) Thus the soul is brought into the closest connexion with the Son of the living God, in heaven; and finding that all the springs of its blessing are there, it rises to Him, like water to its level! "I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine," becomes the true expression of its admiring faith.

Ver. 4. "*Thou art beautiful, O my love, as Tirzah,*

comely as Jerusalem, terrible as an army with banners." What a greeting this is! Consider it well, O my soul. Wouldst thou know the *heart* of Jesus? Wouldst thou know His patient love—His unwearied kindness—His inexhaustible goodness? Meditate on this scene. Tarry here a little.

It may be interesting to ascertain the meaning of the reference to Tirzah, Jerusalem, and an army with banners displayed. But, oh! suffer not for a moment any of these things to divert thy thoughts from the Person of the Lord Jesus. True, I admit, these comparisons may be the immediate expression of His love. Then, if so, let them be to thee as streams by which thou mayest surely reach the fountain; but tarry not too long by the stream, the spring is better. The happy effect of the true ministry of the word is to bring the soul into direct contact with the Person of Christ. The aim of the enemy, and the effect of false teaching, is to bring in something between the soul and Christ. Tirzah is no more, Jerusalem is trodden down, and Judah's banner has long been furled; but the heart that found relief in the use of these significant emblems is unchangeably the same. Seek, above all things in the universe, to know the heart of Jesus. "This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent." (John xvii. 3.) To know God's love in Christ to me a sinner is the best thing I can ever know, for then I know the source—the native fountain of every blessing. How often may Christ Himself be missed, even when the soul is delighting in truth. Watch thou, my soul, and pray unceasingly against this.

Now look once more at this unexampled *greeting*, "Thou art beautiful, O my love, as Tirzah, comely as Jerusalem, terrible (or dazzling) as an army with banners." These words, mark, are the first He addresses to His Bride after her sad failure. His lips are opened to the restored backslider by, "Thou art beautiful, O my love." This is Jesus Himself! Who can speak of His love? Art thou at home, my soul, in this atmosphere? Art thou not rivetted to the spot and lost in admiring wonder? Gaze, O gaze, on the Person who thus speaks, and see before His delighted heart a wanderer returned. Let nothing distract thy meditations—seek to profit by it, especially by understanding better the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

It may be helpful to connect with the present scene His last words to her when they last parted. "Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled; for my head is filled with dew, and my locks with the drops of the night." Nothing could be more tender or affectionate than this touching appeal, yet it was then all but entirely unheeded by her. Consequently she fell for a time sadly away. But now we find her fully and happily restored to her Lord. She has perfect confidence in His love. "I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine," is the joyous expression of her soul. But will He say nothing to her for having wandered and behaved foolishly? Will He not be at least distant in His manner at first, that she may be ashamed before Him? Certainly not, seeing she has truly repented of what she has done. The Lord not only forgives but forgets all past offences when we are penitent. He meets every penitent soul with the fullest expression

of His grace. The moment the soul is before Him in its true place, He is unreserved, and throws open the rich treasury of His love. Witness, for example, the Syrophenician woman. (Matt. xv.) No sooner had she taken the Gentile's place than the full blessing of His heart flows out to her. He even commends her faith in the strongest terms. "O woman, great is thy faith; be it unto thee even as thou wilt." He keeps nothing back. She is blessed even to her heart's content. Witness also the poor fallen one at His feet in the house of Simon, and the prodigal in the arms of the Father.

Such is grace—the grace of God in Christ to sinners. The first thing, observe, that the Bridegroom mentions to His Bride, is her faultless beauty in His sight. "Thou art *beautiful*, O my love." Not one word of complaint falls from His lips. He makes no allusion to where she had been, or to what she had done. His love is perfect, and His *grace* is like the *indulgence* of His love. He *will* be gracious according to the *love* of His own heart. He says she is beautiful as "Tirzah, comely as Jerusalem." Tirzah signifies *pleasantness*. It was the royal residence of the kings of Israel before Samaria was built, as Jerusalem was of the kings of Judah. Jerusalem, we know, is famous in Scripture for its many glories. It is spoken of as "Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, the city of the great king. God is known in her palaces as a refuge." *Tirzah* was the capital of the revolted tribes. But the two kingdoms, Israel and Judah, shall be united under one Head in the coming day of glory, to be separated no more for ever. What we have here presented in allegory is taught in plainest terms in the prophets.

"Thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I will take the children of Israel from among the heathen, whither they be gone, and will gather them on every side, and bring them into their own land. And I will make them one nation in the land upon the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king to them all; and they shall be no more two nations, neither shall they be divided into two kingdoms any more at all." Ezekiel xxxvii. 21, 22.

When the twelve tribes are restored and Messiah their king, the glory of the nation shall then be great. "ONE KING SHALL BE KING TO THEM ALL." Then it will be "terrible as an army with banners." This figure conveys the idea, not of that which is *awful*, but of that which is *dazzling*, *brilliant*, glorious—like the imposing effect of an army with banners displayed. The king acknowledges that the effect of the glory of His beloved people thus united in one, overwhelms Him. "Turn away thine eyes from me, for they have overcome me." This is wonderful! who can understand it? To understand it in measure we must know Jesus Himself. No heart enters into the blessing and joy of others like His. It relieves His heart to bless the needy. We find Him travelling far, in the days of His flesh, to meet and bless a fallen daughter of Samaria, or a poor Gentile from the coasts of Tyre and Sidon. It is His joy, and the joy of all heaven, when even one sinner repents and turns to His fulness. But, oh! what will be His joy, when the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem turn to Him with mourning and with weeping—when the long-lost tribes shall appear on the scene and own Him as their true Messiah; when every eye of every tribe shall be fixed on Him; when

every heart shall overflow with His praise; and when, from Jerusalem as a centre, blessing shall flow forth to all nations of the earth.

Then Isaiah liii. will be the material of Israel's new song, and the expression of their weeping joy. "He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we, like sheep, have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." Their beloved Jerusalem shall then become the Jerusalem of God's counsels, and not of man's pride and oppression. Surrounded with mountains, encompassed with walls, bulwarks, and towers, it will be the glory of all lands. "The name of the city from that day shall be Jehovah-Shammah —*The Lord is there.*" (Ezek. xlviii. 35; Psalm xlviii.) The Messiah will then have things all His own way. Satan shall then be shut up in the bottomless pit, the curse removed from the earth, the power of evil put down, and the true Solomon shall reign as King over all. The effect, all over the realm of nature, of the *absence* of Satan, and the *presence* of Christ in power and great glory, is inconceivable.

"O what a bright and blessed world
This groaning earth of ours shall be,
When from its throne the tempter hurled,
Shall leave it all, O Lord, to thee.

But brighter far that world above,
Where we, as we are known, shall know
And in the sweet embrace of love,
Reign o'er this ransomed earth below.'

Ver. 5—7. "*Thy hair is as a flock of goats that appear from Mount Gilead. Thy teeth are as a flock of sheep which go up from the washing, whereof every one beareth twins, and there is not one barren among them. As a piece of a pomegranate are thy temples within thy locks.*" These same expressions occur in chapter iv., and yet we know the Holy Spirit uses no vain repetitions. Then why is this? Since they were used by the Bridegroom in addressing His Bride, in the fourth chapter, she has wandered and returned. By repeating to her what He before said, He assures her heart that her beauty in His sight is unimpaired; although He says nothing about her having been away from Him, these expressions of His unchanged admiration of her, will now take a deeper hold on her heart than before. Their value is increased sevenfold on account of the circumstances in which they are again repeated. The Holy Ghost can use the same expressions, when it is for the glory of Christ and the blessing of our souls. In the present instance, no words could have re-assured her heart like these.

Ver. 8. "*There are threescore queens, and fourscore concubines, and virgins without number.*" This verse, we doubt not, refers to a millennial scene. It follows the union of the two nations. The cities of Judah and the nations of the earth fill up the scene of glory. *Jerusalem has the first place.* This truth, so manifest all through Scripture, is most fully expressed, and in the most touching manner, in the next verse.

Ver. 9. "*My dove, my undefiled is but* ONE; *she is the only* ONE *of her mother, she is the choice* ONE *of her that*

bare her. The daughters saw her, and blessed her; yea, the queens and the concubines, and they praised her." What a place she has in His heart! She is pre-eminent in His sight. None can be compared with her. There are many others, but His affection can see none but herself. "My dove, my undefiled is but *one;* she is the *only one* of her mother." In former scenes He speaks of her qualities, and describes her personal beauty; but now, He speaks of *herself,* and what *she is* to Him. "The choice one of her that bare her." The nation is here viewed in a *maternal* character, and the tribe of Judah in a *bridal.* Such, O my soul, is the Bridegroom-love of Jesus! Thus will it be with the godly remnant of Judah in the latter day—thus it is now, *even now,* with us in spirit. Drink, O drink deeply, of the Bridegroom-love of thy Lord. The fountain is deep, it is inexhaustible, it is free, it is open to faith until the nuptial day.

The time was when the daughter of Zion, in the pride and naughtiness of her heart, refused His love. Still, it remained the same, but then, it was shown in the tears which He shed over her blindness. Being left by Him, she fell a prey to her cruel enemies, who sorely persecuted her. Still, His eye of love followed her in all her wanderings. Nothing could change His heart. In due time He visited her in her low estate. He found her in the condition of a poor, outcast, sunburnt slave—a keeper of the vineyards of others. His heart was kindled towards her. In His love and pity He felt as if she had "received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins." And now, "her warfare is accomplished, her iniquity is pardoned," and she is comforted in her gracious and

forgiving Lord. But His love rests not, blessed truth, until He has accomplished all the desires of His heart towards her. And now, mark, my soul, what is she? Where is she? the fair and beautiful spouse of the true King Solomon—the partner of His royal throne in Zion. And not only, observe once more, is she the object of the King's supreme delight, but she is the object of universal admiration. "The daughters saw her, and blessed her; yea, the queens and the concubines, and they praised her." "And the daughter of *Tyre* (type of the Gentiles) shall be there with a gift; even the rich among the people shall entreat thy favour." (Psalm xlv.) She reflects the glory and beauty of the King, and all nations admire *His* comeliness in *her*. "And thy renown went forth among the heathen for thy beauty; for it was perfect through my comeliness, which I put upon thee, saith the Lord God." Ezekiel xvi. 14.

Ver. 10. "*Who is she that looketh forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners?*" This verse appears to be the language of the Bride's admirers, and comes in like a chorus to the song. All are vocal in her praise. The dreary night is past; the morning breaks. "Who is she that looketh forth as the *morning!*" She is just, as it were, emerging from the darkness of the long, long night, through which she has passed. But now she leaves it all behind, and comes forth in the freshness, beauty, and hope of the morning. She will soon appear in noonday splendour, clothed in the beams of "the Sun of Righteousness."

Hast thou observed, my soul, in thy meditations, that the future light, glory, and dignity of Israel, are frequently represented by the heavenly bodies—the sun, moon, and stars? We see this shadowed forth in Joseph's dreams. In the family of Jacob the whole nation is represented, and is prefigured by the sun, moon, and stars. (Gen. xxxvii.) In Revelation xii. the tribe of Judah, from which our Lord sprang, is seen invested with the same light and glory. The simile is "a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars." The glory of the *twelve* seems concentrated in, and represented by, the royal tribe. There is also the idea of *stability* conveyed by these heavenly luminari s. "Once have I sworn by my holiness that I will not lie unto David. His seed shall endure for ever, and his throne as the *sun* before me. It shall be established for ever as the *moon*, and as a faithful witness in heaven." Psalm lxxxix. 35—37.

Here, pause, for a moment, O my soul, and meditate on the sure word of prophecy, as to Israel's future glory. O what a change for the long-despised, down-trodden Jew! The admiring daughters, queens, and concubines behold the royal tribe—Bridal Judah, "looking forth as the *morning*, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners." Invested with *light*, *glory*, and *dignity*, as the fair spouse of David's royal Son, she becomes the great attraction of earth, and the object of universal admiration. Hail, happy morn! the darkness is past, "the Sun of Righteousness arises with healing in his wings." Already His beams gild the dark mountains of the Holy Land, and cheer its valleys.

All hearts rejoice. Hosanna to the Son of David! the promise is fulfilled. "Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee.... And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising." Isaiah lx. 1, 3.

"Take boughs of goodly trees, the joyous palm,
The willows of the brook, and keep the feast;
The mourner's wounds are healed with oil and balm,
The captive's tears are dried, her sorrows cease;
Rejoice with praise: let harp and cymbal tell
'How goodly are thy tents, O Israel.'

As willows spring beside the winding stream,
So shall thy children's offspring flourish now;
Thy long captivity becomes a dream—
A sweet memorial is that willow bough
Of all thy sorrows, of that *tear-steeped* bread,
On which, by Chebar's stream, thy soul was fed.

Planted in Canaan's fruitful ground,
Her streams shall nourish thy wide-spreading root;
On thee no yellow leaf shall e'er be found,
For Hermon's dew shall feed each verdant shoot.
'*What hath Jehovah wrought!*' the nations cry;
'*Great things for us!*' the ransomed tribes reply."

Ver. 11, 12. "*I went down into the garden of nuts, to see the fruits of the valley, and to see whether the vine flourished, and the pomegranates budded. Or ever I was aware, my soul made me like the chariots of Amminadib.*" How seldom it happens that the husbandman is taken by surprise with the abundance and ripeness of the fruits of his vineyard. How often, alas, it is the other way. Disappointment, not satisfaction, he is often compelled to reap as the fruit of his labour. It had been always so with Israel, we may say, as the Lord's vineyard, until now. But, happily, all is changed!

Grace shines—faith triumphs—the Lord prevails—the people are looking to Him, and counting on Him alone. Everything is ripe in Judah for glory and victory.

Blessed day! the Lord now sees in His people the ripened fruits of His grace. His heart rejoices—it is overpowered with the sight. It is no longer a scene in the wilderness, and His association with them there, but the fruitful garden, with its budding pomegranates, flourishing vines, and fruits of the valley. These fruits of His rich, patient grace, deeply affect Him. His love carries Him towards His now changed and willing people, swift as the chariots of Amminadib. "Or ever I was aware, my soul made me like the chariots of Amminadib;" or, *set me on the chariots of my willing people.* Margin. (Psalm cx. 3.) Wondrous, blessed scene, that the heart of the Lord should be so moved—so impelled by the readiness of His people to receive Him! Is there not something, O my soul, in this aspect of the Lord's love, which calls for deep, special meditation? Surely there is. How wonderful, indeed, but how blessed, that He, who is Lord of all, should be so *transported with delight*, by hearts looking and longing for Himself! Oh! that every anxious, weeping penitent believed this precious truth! When the daughter of Zion bathes His feet with her tears He will turn away from everything else, and hasten to comfort her. Her tears will be His swift chariot. The fulness of His heart will flow forth to her, and a plenary pardon, salvation, and peace, He will pour into her opened ear.

On many a page of the New Testament this sight may be seen. It has always been God's way with the

penitent soul; but in the New Testament we have many scenes portrayed of the Lord's personal love and grace. And in what scene do we not find Him more delighted than the saved sinner? Did He not turn round in the press and look for the one that had touched the hem of His garment? She might have slipped away, as quietly as she came, but His love must have the entire scene brought into view, and recorded in the book of everlasting remembrance. None so interested in what had taken place as Himself. She had touched by faith the innermost spring of His heart, and the virtue that was there flowed out to her. But the Lord wants to see herself, and hear from her own lips the experience of her soul. This done, He cannot let her go until He has acknowledged their kindred relationship, and the blessings which flow therefrom. "Daughter, thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace, and be whole of thy plague." Mark v.

And is He less delighted, or less overcome, by the cry for mercy of the poor blind beggar? (Luke xviii.) By no means. He is on an important journey; must the whole procession stand still for the cry of a poor beggar from the very outer circle of the crowd? The moment the cry for mercy falls on the ear of the Son of David, He is arrested. He moves not another step. "And Jesus stood, and commanded him to be brought unto him: and when he was come near, he asked him, saying, *What wilt thou that I shall do unto thee?*" What a sight! O, look again! A poor blind beggar in the dust, and *Jesus waiting on him.* "What wilt thou that I shall do unto thee?" He seeks not to hurry through His work of mercy; He lingers over the

hallowed scene. It fills and moves His soul. He only knows its wondrous bearings. But what a position for a destitute soul to be in? What wouldst *thou* have asked, my soul, had it been thee? It is as if the Lord had said, "Ask what thou wilt, I am waiting to serve thee—waiting to grant thy request." What will he ask, poor soul? Only what he feels the need of—his natural sight. "And he said, Lord, that I may receive my sight." But the good Lord added to his request a thousand fold. "And Jesus said unto him, Receive thy sight: thy faith hath saved thee." The issues of this scene are glorious! He follows Jesus—glorifies God—and all the people give praise unto Him. The whole scene is like a foreshadowing of millennial times.

But of all the scenes in the New Testament, the parable of the prodigal son, we believe, most fully resembles the scene before us in the Song of Songs. The repentance of the prodigal carries the Father towards him, as on a swift chariot. He *runs* to meet His son. "But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck and kissed him." The love of the Father's heart, and the desire of the son to return to Him, form, as it were, a swift chariot of love. But the Father taking the direction of its course, they rapidly reach their one, eternal, happy home.

Thus will it be with the Beloved in the Song. The deep and godly sorrow of His people in the latter day, and especially those of His own tribe, and their earnest desire for the Messiah to come, act upon His love, and carry Him swiftly to the scene. "Or ever I was aware my soul set me on the chariots of my willing people."

And, now, taking the direction of His people, as the charioteer in the chariot, He accomplishes their full deliverance, and speedily conducts them to glory and triumph.

> "How does the sudden earnestness of prayer
> From much-loved Zion on my spirit press,
> And my heart speed me forward to their aid,
> Borne on the chariots of their strong desire.
> As in the heavens riding for their help,
> And in mine excellency in the sky,
> To thrust away encroaching enemies,
> To place my dove in safety on my breast!"

Ver. 13. "*Return, return, O Shulamite; return, return, that we may look upon thee. What will ye see in the Shulamite? As it were the company of two armies.*" The admiring virgins again join in the chorus. They express their desire to see more of the beauty, perfection, and glory of the Bride. She is walking in the garden of nuts with the King. Precious privilege! They call to her by a new name. "Return, return, O *Shulamite;*" which is the feminine form of *Solomon.* This is significant. Union is accomplished. The long broken relationships are re-established. Grace has wrought a perfect work in her. Blessed be the name of the Lord! He can now make Himself fully known to her; and she truly reflects the beams of His glory, "she is fair as the moon, and clear as the sun." She is established in the favour of the King, and in the possession and enjoyment of His affections. This is rest for the heart—perfect—blessed rest. Nothing can rise above it or go beyond it. Say, my soul, is this thy resting-place? The manifested—the enjoyed affections of thy Well-beloved? He has revealed Himself—given

Himself; what more can He do? We can have no such expression of His love in heaven, as we have on earth—as was manifested on the cross. The blood that was shed there is the perfect rest of the conscience—the love that was revealed there, is the perfect rest of the heart; thou hast *all* now. "Only believe." "We which have believed do enter into rest." Heb. iv.

Other virgins now join in the chorus, and enquire, "What will ye see in the Shulamite?" The answer is ready, "As it were the company of two armies." The *beautiful Tirzah and the comely Jerusalem* are seen united in her. Some have thought, that the company of two armies as seen in the spouse, represent the *old life* and the *new*, at constant war with each other, in the Christian. We think this a mistake. Here, it does not appear to refer to conflict at all; but, rather to peace, unity, and glory. Does it not express the re-union of the long-divided house of Jacob under the Prince of Peace? Judah and Israel are no longer two nations warring with each other, but are joined in one, and here represented by the loving, peaceful spouse of the true Solomon. This union is introductory to the Millennium—the reign of peace. "The envy also of Ephraim shall depart, and the adversaries of Judah shall be cut off; Ephraim shall not envy Judah, and Judah shall not vex Ephraim." (Isaiah xi. 13.) The King of Salem reigns; the twelve tribes are restored; the nations are subdued under them; all is peace. The war trumpet hangs in the hall, swords are beaten into ploughshares, spears into pruninghooks, and the nations do not even *learn* the art of war any more. Isaiah ii. 3.

But, apart from the allegory before us, do the Scrip-

tures countenance the idea, that christian conflict is between *the old life and the new?* Certainly not! The conflict is between *the old life and the Spirit.* "The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh." It is not, "The old life against the new, and the new against the old."* The apostle states in plainest terms, "That our old man is crucified with Christ, that the body of sin might be destroyed." (Rom. vi. 1—11.) It is perfectly plain, then, that *in God's sight, and now to faith, our old nature came to its end on the cross.* We know, of course, as a matter of painful experience, that the old nature we have still exists, and is no feeble thing. And, further, if it be not constantly watched and judged, it will prove a source of ceaseless trouble, both to ourselves and others. But when, through our unwatchfulness, it does rise up, it is met in conflict, not by the new life, but by the Holy Spirit, who dwells in the Christian.

Practical Christianity may be said to consist of two things: 1. In nourishing the new life through occupation with Christ. 2. In judging the old, on which God has put the sentence of death in the most awfully-solemn manner, in the cross. But some may ask, "How are we to watch against its risings and judge it!" The apostle answers, "This I say then, *Walk in the Spirit and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.*" We have no power against nature but in the Holy Spirit, and in the assurance, by faith, that the flesh is

* The new life would be but a feeble antagonist to the old, as may be seen in Romans vii. 14—24, where we have the experience of this life without any mention of the Spirit, and without any knowledge of that accomplished redemption, on which the gift of the Spirit depends.

a crucified thing in God's mind, and done with for ever. t was on the cross that our old man was crucified; there it was nailed to the tree, and made a full end of; we have to believe this, and walk in the power and liberty which faith gives.

Hast thou entered, my soul, into the right understanding of this foundation-truth—this peace-giving truth to the troubled soul? Know, then, for thy perfect rest and comfort, that from the moment we have life through faith in Christ, the whole of our corrupt nature is spoken of and treated in Scripture as a dead thing. "Ye are dead," is the emphatic word of Scripture, but that is not all, thank God, "and your life is hid with Christ in God." (Col. iii. 3.) How safe! how secure! "with Christ in God." Could our old nature, or anything that belongs to it, be hidden there? Ah, no; all that was thine is gone—gone for ever; all that is Christ's remains—remains in all its changeless perfection in the best place in all heaven. By the cross we get rid of that which is ours—in resurrection we are put in possession of that which is Christ's. Not a particle of the old creation shall ever be found in the new.

The apostle gives us a full statement of this blessed truth, as in his own case. "I am crucified with Christ," he says, "nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." Here he speaks of himself, in one point of view, as dead; and in another, as alive. How can this be understood? By faith only. He speaks of two "I's;" the old "I," or self, as slain—or crucified. The new "I," as his new life—Christ in him. The first, he treats as dead, and for ever done with; the second, as his only life now. "Christ liveth in me." The prac-

tical effect of this truth, when believed, is immense. *Self, wretched self*, which is the end and object of the natural man, in all he does, is gone—gone, I mean, to faith. Christ enters and takes the place of *self*. "For me to live is Christ"—is to have Christ, not self, for my end and object. Christ, not self, is the spring now. We know, of course, that Paul had his natural life here below—the life he ever had as a man, but the life in which he lived, was a wholly new one—Christ in him. "The life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me."

All this is as true now, in principle, of every Christian, as it was of the apostle, though it may not be so brightly manifested. There must first be faith in the truth, then a life answering to the strength which that faith gives. However, it is plainly written, "They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts." Not, observe, *are* crucifying it, but *have* crucified it. But of whom is this great truth stated? Of highly advanced Christians? No, simply of "they that are Christ's." It is as true of the babe, as of the young man, or the father in Christ. What was it that needed crucifying on the cross? Something that belonged to Christ, or to me? It was the old and great "I," that needed to be slain—nailed to the tree, and that was done in Christ, for ever blessed be His name. Oh! to believe it—to keep self where the cross has put it—to walk in the liberty and power of the Holy Spirit, and be only, and always occupied, with the risen and glorified Christ.

CHAPTER VII.

Ver. 1. "*How beautiful are thy feet with shoes, O prince's daughter.*" The spouse of the King is again minutely surveyed, and addressed by a new title. "O prince's daughter." Her connexion with *royalty* is now acknowledged. She is brought into the closest relationship with the King. This is manifest to all. When Messiah takes the throne, according to the plain and forcible language of Psalm xlv., this will be her place. There we read, "*Upon thy right hand did stand the queen in gold of Ophir.*" When He enters the scene, and takes the throne of his father David, every thing is changed in Israel. What a change for Jerusalem! What a change for the Jewish people! Jerusalem will have the *first* place, and all the cities of Judah shall own it. The *earth's* blessing will also come in then through the exaltation of the Jews. "Instead of thy fathers shall be thy children, whom thou mayest make princes in all the earth."

And now, hear, as it were, His first address from the throne to His beloved people. "Hearken, O daughter, and consider, and incline thine ear; forget also thine own people and thy father's house; so shall the king greatly desire thy beauty; for he is thy Lord, and worship thou him." It was no longer the glory of the fathers—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but the brighter glory of the true seed royal of the house of Judah. *Christ is all in all.* He who loves righteousness and

hates wickedness, proves Himself fit to govern. In righteousness and in judgment, He has brought in the full triumph and glory of the Jewish people. He has led them on to victory over the heads of all their foes. He who led them into captivity, is now a captive in the bottomless pit. Christ is on the throne, and all His enemies are made His footstool. And now, the people are to look to *Him*, not to the *fathers*, in whom they have hitherto boasted. "We be Abraham's seed," was once their empty boast, to the lowly Jesus; but every thing is changed now. Hence the emphatic word to the daughter of Zion; "*Forget thine own people, and thy father's house: so shall the king greatly desire thy beauty: for he is thy Lord; and worship thou him.*"

But has this beautiful address from the lips of Jesus, though as King of the Jews, no voice to thee, my soul? Is it only fit for Israel? Far from it, I would say. In spirit, and in principle, it is plainly applicable to all Christ's disciples now. "Abide in me"—"Follow me," are still deeper. No sooner is a soul converted to Jesus, than it should, in that sense, forget, and turn away from, all its old associations. Everything contrary to His will, or that would hinder us in carrying out His will, should be given up, and, as it were, forgotten. The application of the passage is easy, provided we are prepared to give up our hearts to Him. "My son, give me thine heart, and let thine eyes observe my ways," is surely a fair demand, at all times, from Him who gave *Himself* for us. His devotedness to *us* is complete. He kept nothing back; He gave all. He loved us, and gave Himself for us. Not only His *life*, true and blessed as that is, but He gave *Himself*. The cross, of

course, is the strongest expression of His love that we can ever have. But in giving Himself, He gives *all that He is*, as the Man Christ Jesus—the Saviour of sinners. Observe, especially, I pray thee, the *greatness* of this gift—HIMSELF! And also, the *giver*—HE, gave Himself. All His qualities— all His excellencies, are given in this gift. This is love—this is devotedness —this is consecration. He keeps back nothing from us; His love is perfect. He—Himself, is mine.

Now I have found a friend,
Jesus is mine;
His love shall never end,
Jesus is mine.

We have a full Christ, adored and blessed be His name! May we allow nothing, that would lessen to the soul His fulness—may we count self, and all that belongs to it, as dross. His wisdom, His righteousness, His peace, His joy, His grace, His glory—in short, the perfection of His work, His more abundant life in resurrection, and the glory of His Person—all are the believer's in the gift of Himself. Take one illustration of this marvellous truth, and see that thou fully understand this mystery of perfect love, O my soul. It is written, that He "made peace through the blood of his cross." "Peace," in this connexion, means *reconciliation.* We *are* reconciled, our peace *is* made, according to the perfection of His work on the cross. But it is also written, "Peace I leave with you, *my peace I give unto you.*" Here, "peace" does not mean *reconciliation*, but Christ's *own peace.* "My peace"—a peace answering to the *glory of His Person*, which He

leaves to us as a legacy in this troubled scene. And He gives not as the world gives; the world gives a part, and keeps a part, but He gives *all*. Oh, what blessing! What has love not done! Oh, what a ground of confidence for the heart in this unspeakable gift. To know that "Jesus is mine," is to know the sweetness of full peace, and quiet rest, in His own blessed presence. But if there be such a ground for *confidence* in this gift, Oh, what a *motive* there is, for whole-hearted devotedness—for entire consecration of body, soul, and spirit to the blessed Lord! May we *know* the confidence, and *act* from the motive. May *our* love be the fair reflection of *His*.

> "Thine eye confiding, manifests the love,
> A love producing love reciprocal,
> Which overshadoweth thy being's course,
> As face to face in water answereth—
> Yea, as one passing by Bath-rabbim's gate,
> In Heshbon's waveless mirrors may behold
> The faithful transcript of o'erhanging skies."

It is rather difficult to say, whether the first five verses of this chapter are addressed to the Bride by the daughters of Jerusalem, or by the Bridegroom. The tone of verse 6, which is evidently His, appears to be deeper. In chapter iv. when speaking of her qualities, He begins with the *head*. And in chapter v. where the Bride gives a full length portrait of her Beloved, she also begins with the head. But here it is different, the description begins with the *feet*, and ends with the head. She appears to be looked at, in this passage, from earth's point of view; as if the daughters of Jerusalem were first attracted by her walk. Besides, the portrait

here given, is not so much her own personal, faultless beauty, which the Bridegroom so admires, and delights to dwell upon, as the circumstances and associations of royalty. Or, perhaps, more that which is national glory, than personal beauty. But we must bear in mind as we go along, that the spouse represents, for all Israel, great glory and blessing.

Having examined with some care, when meditating on chapters iv. v., each feature therein described, we would now do little more than endeavour to point out the most obvious bearing of the present comparisons.

The expression, "How beautiful are thy feet with shoes, O prince's daughter," conveys to the mind, more the idea of *majestic footsteps—stately goings*, than of the general walk. "The joints," being like *jewels*, giving freedom to the *step*, strengthens this view of the passage. Her *gait* is noble, majestic, suited to royalty. "*A round goblet which wanteth not liquor . . . . an heap of wheat set about with lilies*," surely denote an abundance of that which *cheers and sustains;* and yet, these are surrounded with *grace* and *humility*. A *fence* of lilies forbids the approach of none to come and partake of the king's munificence; but sweetly invites, as it were, in the words of wisdom, "Come, eat of my bread, and drink of the wine which I have mingled." Such will be the fulness and character of earthly blessing, under the peaceful reign of the true King Solomon. An abundance of corn and wine, fenced off with lilies. What an idea these beautiful and significant symbols give of millennial blessing! An overflowing abundance with true lowliness of mind. What must be the beauty and fragrance, the peace and security, of that land,

whose border defences are the lilies of the valley! What must be the impression produced on those who come up to Jerusalem! Jesus is there! The King of Salem reigns, He is having everything His own way. That explains all.

The *twin roes* may point out the unity, harmony, and great family likeness which shall then characterize the people of the land. Referring to their blessing under the new covenant in the future day, the word says, "Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean; from all your filthiness, and from all your idols will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them. And ye shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers: and ye shall be my people and I will be your God." (Ezek. xxxvi. 25—28.) The apostle, in applying these promises to Israel, notwithstanding their present dispersion, says, "For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people. And they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me from the least to the greatest." (Heb. viii. 11, 12.) Who could doubt, with such texts before them, the full restoration of Israel, the reality and *uniformity* of their blessing?

The "*tower of ivory*" would suggest the thought of *great riches and exaltation.* It would also bespeak *national glory* if not *national purity*—ivory being snowy white. "*The fishpools of Heshbon*," that which is *calm, deep, clear, and reflective.* If the "tower of ivory" bespeak Israel's *national* riches, may not the "fishpools of Heshbon" bespeak their *national character?* What so beautiful or suggestive, as the calm, full, bright eye? Besides, it is said of Israel, "Mine eyes are ever toward the Lord." (Psalm xxv.) This will be *singleness* of eye. Lord, hasten it in thy time!

"Serene as Heshbon's tranquil lake,
Thy meditative eyes forsake
The world's distracting joys."

"*The tower of Lebanon which looketh toward Damascus*," suggests the idea of strength, security, supremacy. The Jews, once so persecuted as a people spread over the earth, and so frequently invaded as a nation, especially by the Syrians, can now look out on Syria, and on all the surrounding nations, *in tower-like strength.* All the nations of the earth are at their feet. The tower "looketh toward Damascus"—the capital of their once restless and powerful foe. "For the head of Syria is Damascus, and the head of Damascus is Rezin." A tower on the heights of Lebanon looks out on all, and is seen by all. It will then be known that the power of Jehovah-Jesus *dwells* in the midst of His beloved people. This will be their *national supremacy.*

Ver. 5. "*Thine head upon thee is like Carmel.*" "Carmel," in Scripture, is the type of *fruitfulness.* It was famous

for its vineyards, gardens, and rich herbage. "Thine head *upon thee*," would seem to point out a *head ornament*, not the head of the body. The reference may be to a crown, or wreath of laurels, presenting "the excellency of Carmel," and emblematic of the land's fruitfulness—*national abundance*. Israel is crowned with goodness. They are blessed with all earthly blessings in Emmanuel's land. But glorious as that will be, (and glorious it *shall* be,) still it is but the contrast, divinely drawn, of the Church's blessings, even while she wanders a pilgrim in this world. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who *hath* blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ." This is the character and measure of the Christian's blessing, if measured it can be. And here note, my soul, for thy deepest and loftiest meditations, the three things spoken of in this wonderful verse: 1. "*All spiritual blessings.*" Not one is wanting. And, observe, they are *spiritual*, adapted to our new nature. 2. "*In heavenly places.*" The highest sphere —the best of places—not *earthly* places, like Israel's in the land of Canaan, blessed as theirs will be. 3. "*In Christ*"—in the most blessed and excellent way that God could give them. Here, we can draw no comparison; we can only worship and adore. Oh! to enter more fully into that which is already ours, in Christ, according to the love of God our Father; that we may be *holy and without blame before Him in love.*

"*And the hair of thine head like purple; the king is held in the galleries.*" "Purple" is the emblem of *royalty*. The eye rising from the *beautiful shoes* to the *bridal coronet*, finds all perfect. The fair spouse of the

King is *faultless*. And the comparisons are suggestive of true national greatness and glory. The King is overcome by her attractions. He is bound, as it were, by her comeliness—comeliness which He has put upon her. "She is all glorious within the ivory palaces; her clothing is of wrought gold; she shall be brought unto the King in raiment of needlework." "The King is held in the galleries." He cannot leave His royal Bride. Wondrous love! wondrous grace! Oh, to know the heart of Jesus!

"The glorious and majestic One,
Whom death nor hell could e'er detain,
Is by thy powerful graces won,
And tied as with a mighty chain.

Strange loveliness it is that sways
The Sovereign Regent of the skies;
Constraining Him to stay and gaze,
The charms do so attract His eyes.

Faith's efforts bold o'ercome the King;
How happy they the conquest share,
Who to His sacred courts Him win,
And then have power to hold Him there!"

Ver. 6. "*How fair and how pleasant art thou, O love, for delights!*" This, we doubt not, is the Bridegroom's voice. We perceive more depth of feeling and interest in this verse than in the previous five. Others may *admire* her, but He *delights* in her. Through His patient grace, a moral resemblance to Himself has been wrought in her. This He now sees and delights in. The more perfectly Christ sees in us His own likeness, the more He will delight in us. This is necessarily true, yet a truth that is easily understood by all.

A strictly upright man can find no delight in one that is crooked in his ways. An honest man can find no pleasure in one who is dishonest. A morally pure person can have no fellowship with one who would drag him through all the impurities of a low and degraded nature. Assuredly not. The upright man can only delight in uprightness, the honest man in honesty, and the pure in purity. So the blessed Lord can find His delight only in that which resembles His own moral perfections. Oh! what a needed, practical lesson, thou mayest learn from this fact, O my soul! In what respect, let me ask, and in what measure, is thy moral resemblance to Christ? Think of His love, His holiness, and the perfection of all His ways; and then inquire—in what respect, in what measure, does He see His own moral image practically reflected in thee? And, consequently, how far can He find His delight in thee? Resist not these searching inquiries—abide in the light—let all thy practical ways be fairly examined there. And seek above all things, conformity to Him, who has left us an example that we should walk in His steps. How sweet to a soul that loves Him must that word be from His own lips, "How fair and how pleasant art thou, O love, for delights!"

But before dismissing this subject, it may be well to notice for a moment the teaching of Scripture on the blessed subject of our *oneness with Christ*—our *completeness in Him;* which is like the other side of the same subject. Practically we come infinitely short of Christ, yet, in spirit and in virtue of His finished work we are *one with Him*, as risen and glorified. This is a glorious truth: is it plainly taught in Scripture? Take

the following texts as a sample of many that might be quoted. "He that is joined unto the Lord is one Spirit." (1 Cor. vi. 17.) "For by *one Spirit* are we all baptized into *one body*, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into *one Spirit*." (1 Cor. xii. 13.) "And you, being dead in your sins, and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he *quickened together with him*, having forgiven you all trespasses." (Col. ii. 13.) "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are *in Christ Jesus*." Rom. viii. 1.

The blessed position of the believer in Christ, is abundantly taught in Scripture. And faith asks nothing more than the plain word of God. Our own frames and feelings would only mislead us on this all important subject; and doubts and fears would only be to doubt the work of redemption, on which the truth of our oneness with Christ is based. Being *one with Him* as risen from the dead and exalted on high, we are partakers with Him of the same life and privileges before God. It is plainly stated, for example, that Christ is our life. "When Christ, *who is our life*, shall appear." If, then, the question be raised as to whether we have eternal life, the believer may reply, by asking the question, "Has Christ eternal life? for the word of God affirms that Christ is our life." Again, as to our oneness in *righteousness*. We are "made the righteousness of God *in Him*." As to *acceptance*, we are "accepted *in the beloved*." As to *position*, we "sit together in heavenly places *in Christ*." Observe the form of the expression, "In Christ—in Him." And mark especially the fulness of the following verses.

"But of him are ye *in Christ Jesus*, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." (1 Cor. i. 30.) "And ye are complete *in him*, which is the head of all principality and power." (Col. ii. 10.) "In Him," observe, who is above "all principality and power," even above the angels that never sinned.

Some, we are aware, speak of this heavenly character of truth as *unpractical*, and sometimes in less worthy terms. This we think a serious mistake, and one that must lead to serious consequences. On the contrary, we firmly believe, that the Christian's full assurance of pardon, justification, peace, acceptance, will be in proportion to the clearness of his apprehension, and the measure of his enjoyment, of these truths, as taught in the word of God. Salvation is nothing short of *passing from death unto life*. Then, where am I—what am I, if death is behind me? *Associated with a risen Christ, and eternally one with Him.* "We are members of his body." As the hand and foot, the eye and ear, are included in the man, so is the believer included in Christ.

So far from this character of truth being unpractical, we have no hesitation in saying, that our moral resemblance to Christ now, will be proportionate to our knowledge of, and fellowship with, our exalted Head in heaven. What made Paul so heavenly minded? His eye was fixed on Christ in the glory, and his heart breathed fervently after Him there. "One thing I do." Christ in heaven was the "one thing" before his soul. This, and this alone, will produce on earth, that in which Christ finds His delight—His own moral image

reflected in us. Knowing this, may we set the Lord always before us, and ever seek to do the things which please Him,

But in the midst of all our shortcomings, it is comforting to know that in the day of His coming glory, He will be surrounded with that which He loves and in which He delights. Then the heavenly saints shall be fashioned like unto His own glorious body—changed into the same image. "We know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him, *for* we shall see him as he is." And then, too, of Israel, as a nation on the earth, it will be said, "Thou shalt no more be termed *forsaken;* neither shall thy land be termed *desolate;* but thou shalt be called *Hephzibah*, (i.e., my delight is in her,) and thy land *Beulah*, (i.e., married,) for the Lord delighteth in thee, and thy land shall be married." (Isaiah lxii. 4.) Lord, hasten it in thy time, for thine own name's sake!

Ver. 7. "*This thy stature is like to a palm tree, and thy breasts to clusters of grapes.*" The "palm tree" and the "clusters of grapes," may be considered as the emblems of *victory* and *maturity*—of *uprightness* and *fruitfulness*. The palm is much spoken of throughout Scripture, and variously applied as a symbol. As to its natural form, its stem is slim but graceful, erect and lofty; the type of *uprightness*. "They are upright as the palm tree." Though pressed, or bound downwards for a time, it refuses to grow crooked, and soon recovers its perpendicular form. Wondrous illustration of the long pressure that has been on the Jews, and of the way they will yet lift up their heads. The leaves and

fruit cluster richly at the top, and have the form of a crown or canopy. Some kinds grow to a great height, so that the fruit is not easily reached, the stem being branchless. This circumstance may be referred to in the next verse: "I said, I will go up to the palm tree, I will take hold of the boughs thereof." The fruits of the Spirit are never beyond the Lord's reach. He gathers and appreciates the fruits of grace in His people. It is said to be the sure sign of *water* in the desert—that sweet springs of water are always found near to the palms; so that no sight is more welcome to the eye of the thirsty traveller than the palm tree. This historical fact is most interesting and suggestive, and seems to agree with Scripture. "And they came to Elim, where were twelve wells of water, and three-score and ten palm trees: and they encamped there by the waters." Exodus xv. 27.

We have also frequent reference in Scripture to the branches of the palm tree as the emblem of *victory*. They were the sign of the feast of tabernacles to the Jews; a period of great rejoicing in Israel. "And ye shall take you on the first day the boughs of goodly trees, *branches* of palm trees, and the boughs of thick trees, and willows of the brook: and ye shall rejoice before the Lord your God seven days." (Lev. xxiii. 40.) The innumerable multitude which John, in vision, saw, before the throne and before the Lamb, were "clothed with white robes, and *palms in their hands*." Many thoughts as to Israel's past, present, and future history pass before the mind, in meditating on the expressive illustrations before us, but we can only at present briefly apply them.

The fair spouse of the King has now reached her moral maturity. Blessed truth! Grace has triumphed! She is perfect in His sight—the delight of His heart—the reflection of Himself. The prayer is answered and the promise fulfilled. "Let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us." "The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree." Moreover the feast of tabernacles is come. She waves her palm of victory—her joy is full. Elevated and upright as the palm, with its luxuriant crown, and living waters welling up, and flowing forth from its roots. Lowly, weak, and dependent, like the feeble vine, yet clinging to the Mighty One and bearing much fruit to His glory. Loveliest of emblems of man's low estate and of abundant fruitfulness through trust in God—abiding in the true vine. "For when I am weak, then am I strong." Fragrant also, she is, as the apple tree—the chosen emblem of the well-Beloved, she spreads abroad the sweet odours of His name.

From the ninth verse it would appear that the Bridegroom now reposes in the charms of His Bride. His heart is at rest. Wondrous truth! He sees in her of the travail of His soul and is satisfied. The desires of His love are answered. What love! What grace! What blessing! Happy Bride! Happy Israel! Perfectly and for ever restored; the Lord thy God rests in thee. He is revived, refreshed, and cheered by "the best wine," which thou hast prepared for thy Beloved. "Causing the lips of those that are asleep to speak." Should there be the least doubt on my reader's mind of the full, happy, glorious, and blessed restoration of the Jews, let him carefully read the following beautiful

prophecy. Surely no one could question that it is still unfulfilled. "Sing, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel: be glad and rejoice with all the heart, O daughter of Jerusalem. The Lord hath taken away thy judgments, he hath cast out thine enemy; the King of Israel, even the Lord, is in the midst of thee; thou shalt not see evil any more. In that day it shall be said to Jerusalem, Fear thou not; and to Zion, Let not thine hands be slack. The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love; he will joy over thee with singing." Zeph. iii. 14—17.

"For what though Judah's palm tree now is dry,
Withered and leafless, like a beacon-mast,
Though 'Raze it, Raze it,' is the taunting cry,
Yon pallid crescent moon is waning fast;
'Twill soon be quenched. Then Israel's night is o'er,
Her sun shall rise, her moon shall wane no more.

Palm branch in hand, go forth to meet the King;
Messiah comes! rejected once, and slain.
Daughter of Zion, loud 'hosannahs' sing!
Who came to suffer once—now comes to reign.
Beneath the palm tree Israel's Judge shall sit;
Behold the people gathering at His feet."

Ver. 10. "*I am my beloved's, and his desire is toward me.*" This, we may truly say, is the highest note in the Song of Songs. And yet, we may as truly say, it is the lowest. Now the soul is done with itself, and entirely occupied with Christ. It expresses, we believe, the highest apprehension of Christ. His desire is toward me—He delights in me. Consequently, self is lost sight of. *Grace* has done its perfect work—the

soul is *established* in grace. This is the perfection of beauty in the people of the Lord; and always that in which He delights. So long as a soul is under law, it never reaches this place of confidence, rest, peace, and joy. It never strikes so high a note. No matter who, where, or when, the soul that is under law must be troubled with doubts and fears. Not but that the law is good, but we cannot keep it, and we cannot remain always here, for leave this world we must; then the solemn question arises, how shall it fare with me at the judgment-seat? A dark cloud hangs over the future. The troubled soul believes not, though plainly written, that by grace, through faith, *it has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but is passed from death unto life.* John v. 24.

Grace alone can bring the soul into this blessed, happy state. Law never can, because it condemns those who break it, and shows no mercy. Besides, if I have fear now, I have torment. But "perfect love casteth out fear; because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love." This "perfect love" expresses itself in *perfect grace*, and grace alone establishes the soul in the perfect love of our Lord Jesus Christ, and in the perfect work which He has accomplished for us. Israel sang praise to God on Canaan's side of the Red Sea, where grace flowed without rebuke in their complete redemption; but at the foot of Sinai, where they heard the thunders of the law, there was no singing; it was all fearing and trembling. Ever since then Israel has been under law, and must be, until their Messiah come again. At the same time, we know, of course, that those who now repent, and believe in Jesus, give

up their Jewish ground, and become members of the Church of God—the body of Christ; and are brought into all the privileges and blessings of a present salvation.

The condition of the Jews, as such, and especially as having crucified the Lord, is strikingly presented in the case of the manslayer under the law. He was compelled to remain in the city of refuge, until a change took place in the priesthood. (Num. xxxv.) In this significant type, we see Israel's full deliverance when their Messiah comes in His Melchizedec glory. Then He will set them free from the pressure of law, under which they are suffering; and deliver them out of the hands of all their enemies. He will also meet them according to the ancient type in Genesis xiv., and refresh and cheer their fainting hearts with the bread and wine of the kingdom. Then their long blinded eyes shall be opened to see their own Messiah, and that He is all for them. This will be the relief, the rest, and the joy of their hearts.

This is a character of experience which the Spirit of prophecy does not present in the Song. It would not be in harmony with its object. Here, it is more the exercises of the heart—the affections, that are given. In the Psalms, for example, it is chiefly the exercises of conscience that we find the remnant passing through.

If we look back to chapter ii. 16, we find the Bride expressing the joy of her heart in that she had found the Messiah—in possessing Him. "My beloved is mine, and I am his." In chapter vi. 3, we find her experience considerably higher. Her heart finds sweet satisfaction in knowing that she *belongs to Him*. "I

am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine." But in the verse under our immediate meditation, she reaches the highest point in a soul's experience, she rests in the happy assurance that *His heart delights in her.* "I am my beloved's, and his desire is toward me." This is the happy fruit of His own patient, perfect grace; she is all beauty and perfection in His sight—she is clothed in the comeliness of grace. She knows this, and this is the perfect rest of her heart. "His desire is toward me." Higher than this, the soul never can rise; better than this, the soul never can find. It is finding all in the love—the changeless love of Christ. This must ever, and only, be the heart's deepest joy and sweetest peace. Oh! happy state for a poor sinner saved by grace to be in, and to be in *now!* To find all its fresh springs in the love of Jesus! To be able to say, "He knows me thoroughly—He knows what I am in myself—what I am in Him. Yet, nevertheless, He not only loves me, but delights in me." There is nothing beyond this. Oh! wondrous truth! Here pause for a moment in thy meditations, O my soul. And may I venture to ask of thee, "Has thy harp ever been tuned to take this note? And canst thou take it easily? Is there no strain in reaching it? And hast thou learnt to *dwell* upon it—sounding it long and fully?" This ought to be the key-note of all our praise—the uniform condition of our souls. We start, if we start aright on our christian course, with the knowledge of the love of Jesus—of the efficacy of His sacrifice—of the completeness of redemption—of the certainty of glory. And should the song of His love ever become feeble on our lips? Surely it should become stronger and stronger, as we near the

bright realms of glory, where the same Jesus, and the same love, shall be our happy song for ever.

"O how I thirst the chains to burst,
That weigh my spirit downward;
And there to flow, in love's full glow,
With hearts like thine surrounded!
Lord, haste that day of cloudless ray—
That prospect bright unfailing:
Where God shall shine in light divine,
In glory never fading."

Ver. 11. "*Come, my beloved, let us go forth into the fields; let us lodge in the villages; let us get up early into the vineyards; let us see if the vine flourish, whether the tender grape appear, and the pomegranate bud forth; there will I give thee my loves.*" The Bride now addresses the Bridegroom, in the full communion and happy enjoyment of His love. Observe the change in the tone and character of her address. It is far beyond anything we have heard from her before. And she speaks only of those things which she knows to be well-pleasing to Him. There is oneness of mind and heart. Her faith has attained to the measure of His thoughts and affections concerning herself. Thus it was with David in the Valley of Elah. His faith rose to the height of God's thoughts and affections concerning His people Israel, and so reckoned on Him. This is the true ground of communion. In Christ the believer has it fully and perfectly displayed *now*, and such should be the character of his communion—oneness of mind and heart with Christ.

The love of Jesus to us-ward, is not in word only, but in full, perfect manifestation. His work is finished.

And, moreover, we have, according to the promise in John xiv., the Holy Ghost *in us*, as individuals, (1 Cor. vi. 19,) and *with us*, as the assembly of God. (1 Cor. iii. 16, 17.) And is not He the witness, seal, and revealer to our souls of the love of Jesus, and our oneness with Him? Why then should the tone and character of our communion be lower than the whole will of Christ concerning us? But it may be that we grieve the Holy Spirit by our unbelief, our worldliness, and the untenderness of our ways; and so lose that character of communion with Christ, which an ungrieved Spirit alone can give. Oh! watch and pray, my soul, that thou mayest live, walk, and worship, in the light and power of a present, ungrieved Holy Spirit.

The expression, "Let us go forth into the fields; let us lodge in the villages," &c., seems to intimate that the blessings and glories of the millennium are extending beyond the limits of Israel. The *fields* and the *villages* are outside the city. Jerusalem and the cities of Judah, as forming the earthly centre of Messiah's glory, will, no doubt, first be filled therewith. But from this centre it will spread forth on the right hand and on the left, until the whole earth be filled with His glory. But the peculiar sweetness and blessedness of the truth before us is—that the Jews are *associated* with their Messiah in this wide-spreading glory. They are formed for each other; and they, together, spread, witness, enjoy, and delight in all the blessings of the earth. This seems perfectly clear from the words of the Spouse, "Come, my beloved, let *us* go forth—let *us* lodge—let *us* get up early—let *us* see if the vine flourish," &c. They visit and survey, in happy fellow-

ship, the varied, and wide-extending fields of millennial glory. Then she adds, with a confidingness of heart that is thoroughly at home in His presence, "*There will I give thee my loves.*" Her heart is overflowing. There is now, as it were, an excess of love. Hence she uses the plural, "loves." Exceeding, abundant, excellent love. Our love can never be too fervent, or too abundant, when Christ is the object.

The Church, I need not say, and all saints that are raised with her, shall, ere this, be glorified with Christ in the Jerusalem above. For it is the purpose of God to gather together all things in heaven and earth under one Head, Christ. He will hold under His power, both the heavenly and earthly departments of His kingdom. Then they will be joined together, as by Jacob's ladder. The glory of the heavenly saints will be visible to those on earth, and indeed to all the world. "That the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me." (John xvii. 23.) And in reference to the New Jerusalem it is said, "And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it." Rev. xxi. 24.

Ver. 13. "*The mandrakes give a smell, and at our gates are all manner of pleasant fruits, new and old, which I have laid up for thee, O my beloved.*" The happy Spouse now finds that there is in her heart, for the Son of David, an abundance of precious fruits; such as love, gratitude, praise, and devotion. Indeed, all manner of precious fruits, new and old. There is much depth and beauty in the closing sentence of her address, "Which I have laid up for thee, O my beloved." An

entirely new character of feelings have been awakened in her soul for the Lord Himself. Such as she has never had, and never could have for anyone else. Her heart, so long desolate and barren, is now filled and fruitful with her own Messiah's love. He has created affections peculiar to Himself—affections which have been laid up, as it were, during the whole period of her wanderings, and kept for the Lord alone. "*Which I have laid up for thee, O my beloved.*"

CHAPTER VIII.

VER. 1. "*O that thou wert as my brother, that sucked the breasts of my mother! when I should find thee without, I would kiss thee; yea, I should not be despised. I would lead thee and bring thee into my mother's house, who would instruct me: I would cause thee to drink of spiced wine of the juice of my pomegranate.*" These verses evidently take us back and not forward, as to the position and experience of the Bride. We parted with her, at the close of chapter vii., amidst the ripening scenes of the latter-day glory, and in happy companionship with her Beloved. *They were together.* The dark night of her sorrow was past, with all its painful experience; and the happy day of her glory had come with all its untold blessedness. But here we are led back to the very foundation of all the exercises through which she has passed in reaching this point; namely, the ardent desire of her heart for unhindered, unrestrained communion with Messiah, the King. She

desires the full liberty of kindred affection. "O that thou wert as my brother!" This answers to the commencement of the book: "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth: for thy love is better than wine."

Chapter viii., as has been said, stands by itself, and recapitulates the principles of the whole book. Looking at it in this light, we will do little more than point out what we believe to be the path of the Spirit in this concluding chapter of our beautiful Song of Songs.

The deep desires of the spouse, as here expressed by the Spirit of prophecy, are at once and fully satisfied. She desires full possession of Christ, and to have the opportunity of causing Him to drink of the spiced wine of her pomegranates. Now she knows, that *once* He drank the bitter cup of God's wrath for her sins, and she longs to present to Him a cup of choice wine, which her gratitude and devotedness have mingled for Him alone. Like the returning prodigal, she is immediately embraced, and rests in the arms of her Beloved. The daughters of Jerusalem are again charged not to stir, or awake the loved one while she is enjoying His love. "*His left hand should be under my head, and his right hand should embrace me. I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, that ye stir not up, nor awake my love until he please.*" She is next seen as "*coming up from the wilderness, leaning on her beloved.*" She is moving on—journeying towards the sunny hills of Canaan, in dependence on Her Beloved, and under the shadow of His wings, Egypt and the wilderness are left behind.

The Bridegroom now reminds the Bride of the *source* of all her blessing, "*I raised thee up under the apple tree.*" The "apple tree" is the emblem of Christ Him-

self. "As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons." Her divine life, and every blessing connected with it, she derives from Christ. "I raised thee up under the apple tree"—quickened, blest with all earthly blessings in a glorious land *under Christ*. It is never said that the Christian has life and blessing *under Christ*, but *with Him*. This important truth marks the difference between Jewish and Christian blessing. Both, of course, derive their life and blessing from Him. But it is said of Christians, that they are "quickened *together* with Christ—raised up *together*—and seated *together* in heavenly places in Christ Jesus." (Eph. ii. 5, 6.) Israel, as such, belongs to the earth; we, as Christians, belong to the "heavenly places." Before conversion, we belong to earth; after it, we belong to heaven. There our names are written, and there we are now seated in Christ.

The Bridegroom further reminds His spouse of her relation to the nation of Israel. "*There thy mother brought thee forth; there she brought thee forth that bare thee.*" The remnant of the nation in whose heart grace works, becomes the Bride of the great King. She represents, more especially, the remnant of Judah, who will be at Jerusalem before the remnant of Ephraim, or the ten tribes are gathered in; but, in principle, she represents the whole nation of Israel. And as Christ Himself sprang from the tribe of Judah, the Spirit of God evidently sanctions the use of relative titles, and the expression of affections belonging to them.

A feeling of sadness and sorrow passes over the mind, when we think that those for whose faith and encouragement these relationships are owned, and these

beautiful scenes described, are still in the depths and darkness of a terrible unbelief. The veil is still on the heart of Israel. But the way of love, so beautifully described in these Canticles, shall, ere long, become the truthful expression of their experience. But, meanwhile, the Christian has the benefit of this wondrous revelation of hearts and feelings; the Song of Songs having a blessed, moral application to us.

The quickened remnant—Bride of Messiah in His Solomon character—now desires to be as a seal upon His heart according to a love that passeth knowledge. "*Set me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm; for love is strong as death; jealousy is cruel as the grave: the coals thereof are coals of fire, which hath a most vehement flame. Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it; if a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would utterly be contemned.*" Where shall we find love like this? Only in the heart of Jesus. What takes such a hold as death? What keeps it like the grave? What so unsparing as the vehement flame? There is nothing to compare with love. Were a man to offer the substance of his house for love, it would utterly be despised. Many waters cannot quench it; the floods cannot drown it. When love and death met in fearful conflict on the cross, love triumphed, and death was for ever vanquished.

The "seal" on the "heart" and the "arm," may refer to the breastplate and shoulder pieces, as worn by the high priest. The names of the twelve tribes were engraven on precious stones, "like the engravings of a signet," and worn on the *heart* (type of affection) and on the *shoulder* (type of strength) of the high priest,

before the Lord. So shall the happy spouse, ere long, be as a seal on the loving heart and powerful arm of her blessed Lord, as her great High Priest, after the order of Melchizedec.

Ver. 8. "*We have a little sister, and she hath no breasts: what shall we do for our sister in the day she shall be spoken for? If she be a wall, we will build upon her a palace of silver; and if she be a door, we will enclose her with boards of cedar.*" Ephraim, or the long-lost *ten tribes*, are referred to, we doubt not, by the "little sister." Their captivity had taken place before the birth of Christ; so that they know nothing of the exercises through which *Judah*, or the *two tribes*, have passed with reference to the birth, death, resurrection, and return of the Messiah. Nevertheless they come into the enjoyment of the blessed results of His first coming in grace, and of His second coming in glory. And they are *instructed, built up, and established* in the doctrine of Christ, by their more highly favoured sister Judah. "*I am a wall*," she says, "*and my breasts like towers: then was I in his eyes as one that found favour.*" She is strong in the Lord, richly furnished, and in full favour with the King. God's Israel is restored! There are *twelve tribes united*, in the Israel of God; not *ten and two divided*.

"O pray—intensely pray,
Build up Jerusalem, and God will hear
Petitions He has prompted: God will hear,
And from her desolations cause to rise
A wall conspicuous—her growing strength,
Her shining palaces will teach the world,
That God is faithful, and His promise sure."

Ver. 11. "*Solomon had a vineyard at Baal-hamon; he let out the vineyard unto keepers; every one for the fruit thereof was to bring a thousand pieces of silver.*" "Baal-hamon" signifies—*Lord of a multitude;* and evidently refers to the multitude of nations—the whole earth, which now form the vast vineyard of the Lord of Glory. "The earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof, the world and they that dwell therein." (Psalm xxiv.) The millennium has come! The glory of the Lord fills the earth—all hearts rejoice—Jesus reigns; a suitable return is now made to Him by the keepers of the vineyard. Everything is now under the eye of Christ, and according to the principles of His government. But from the vineyard of the Bride, she would have the whole of its fruits to go to King Solomon, save a portion for those who have the charge thereof. "*My vineyard, which is mine, is before me: thou, O Solomon, must have a thousand, and those that keep the fruit thereof two hundred.*" All shall share in the spoils of the fruitful, peaceful, joyful, millennial earth. But *Christ is Lord of all.*

He now addresses, for the last time in these songs of love, His fair, and highly favoured spouse. "*Thou that dwellest in the gardens, the companions hearken to thy voice: cause me to hear it.*" He invites her praise. She is to give the key note to the companions—to the whole earth. Then shall all peoples, tribes, and tongues, catch the flying joy, and roll the rapturous hosannas, "from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth." Creation is filled with joy and gladness, and its loud, long anthems of praise and thanksgiving, greet the ear of its glorious King. "Cause ME to hear it."

Ver. 14. "*Make haste, my beloved, and be thou like to a roe or to a young hart upon the mountains of spices.*" Our lovely song is ended. Its last note is rich and full. The loving spouse fervently desires her Lord's speedy return. She entreats that He may come without delay. The deep affections of her soul for Jesus are manifested by the intensity of her desire for His glorious appearing. Oh! that all our hearts might be united together, as the heart of one man, to join in the deep, earnest, fervent prayer of the spouse, that He may come quickly to our longing hearts—that He may come for the rapture of the Church, the glory of Israel, and the blessing of the whole earth.

Having often been refreshed by quotations from "Metrical Meditations, on the sacred Book of Canticles," we add the closing lines of the poem, with grateful thanks to the author.

One echoing response, and all is still!
One loving answer from the sacred harp
Of waiting Zion to that kind command—
Make haste! Come quickly! O beloved Lord!
Like the young roe that moveth rapidly,
That tarrieth not for man—like agile hart
That springs to sight as with a single bound,
On the spice mountains be thy glory seen,
MAKE HASTE! COME QUICKLY! O BELOVED LORD.

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